

The University of Chicago

**The Early Sermons of Luther  
and their Relation to the  
Pre-Reformation  
Sermon**

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY  
OF THE DIVINITY SCHOOL  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR  
OF PHILOSOPHY  
1935

By  
ELMER CARL KIESSLING

ZONDERVAN PUBLISHING HOUSE  
Grand Rapids, Michigan

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Abbreviations used in the Text  
and the Bibliography

|       |                                                   |
|-------|---------------------------------------------------|
| ARG   | Archiv fuer Reformationsgeschichte                |
| EA    | Erlangen Ausgabe of Luther's Works                |
| ELat  | Erlangen Ausgabe of Luther's Latin Works          |
| HZ    | Historische Zeitschrift                           |
| NKZ   | Neue Kirchliche Zeitschrift                       |
| PRE   | Protestantische Realencyklopaedie                 |
| Walch | Walch's Ausgabe of Luther's Works                 |
| SVRG  | Schriften des Vereins fuer Reformationsgeschichte |
| WA    | Weimar Ausgabe of Luther's Works                  |
| ZKG   | Zeitschrift fuer Kirchengeschichte                |
| ZKT   | Zeitschrift fuer katholische Theologie            |
| ZKW   | Zeitschrift fuer kirchliche Wissenschaft          |
| ZST   | Zeitschrift fuer systematische Theologie          |
| StKr  | Theologische Studien und Kritiken                 |



## PREFACE

When the present writer was casting about for a dissertation topic some time ago, he chanced upon a note in the fourth volume of James Mackinnon's monumental work on Luther in which the author states: "There is no exhaustive treatise, even in German, on Luther's preaching. . . . a systematic research of this vast material is still a desideratum."<sup>1</sup>

Having made a beginning with the study of Luther's works for his master's thesis, the writer felt very much inclined to continue his studies in this direction for the doctrinal dissertation and accordingly examined the extent of the work to be undertaken to supply the desideratum mentioned by the eminent scholar.

A preliminary survey soon showed that the amount of material (over two thousand sermons) was too extensive for the task at hand, especially since a study of late medieval sermonizing seemed essential also for a correct understanding of the Reformer's achievement as a preacher.

As far as Luther's sermons are concerned, therefore, the topic was restricted to those of the early period, from 1512, when he began preaching, to 1522, when he completed the first two parts of the "Kirchenpostille." The first chapter of this dissertation, on the other hand, represents a condensed account of a somewhat detailed study of pre-Reformation preaching.

While a monograph on all of Luther's sermons is thus still lacking, it is hoped that the present work will

not be wholly without value for those desiring an introduction to his sermonic activity.

The writer wishes to acknowledge a special debt of gratitude to his instructor in European church history, Dr. J. T. McNeill, of the Divinity School, whose courtesy and scholarly guidance were a source of encouragement and help all along the way. He also takes this opportunity of expressing his thanks to Dr. J. M. Reu, of Wartburg Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa, who was ever ready to give valuable advice and to lend rare books from his fine library, and to Dr. J. H. Ott, librarian of Northwestern College, Watertown, Wisconsin, whose interest in the Reformer always made him willing to devote a goodly part of a meagre book fund to the purchase of Luther materials.

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# CHAPTER I

## THE PRE-REFORMATION SERMON

### Introduction

On a certain afternoon of the year 1511 under a pear tree within the precincts of the Wittenberg cloister of the Augustinians, a young monk, named Martin Luther, offered fifteen reasons to his friend and superior, the district vicar, John Staupitz, why he should not be made a doctor of theology and a preacher to his brother monks. When Staupitz nevertheless insisted, the agitated monk pleaded: "Herr Staupitz, you are killing me. I won't be able to endure it for three months." The older man, who was noted for his humor, replied drily: "In God's name then. Our Lord has a far-flung empire and can use gifted people in heaven also."<sup>1</sup>

By his expression of trepidation and misgiving Luther revealed in what high honor the calling of the preacher was held in the church at his time. Great as was the veneration for the Mass and the sacrament of orders which conferred the power to celebrate that holy rite, it was nevertheless true that men were admitted to the priesthood at an earlier age and with less training than was required of those who were to preach before a congregation. Before a member of the clergy be permitted to preach, says Jerome Dingersheim in his *Manual of Homiletics* of 1514, he ought to have received a good education and attained the age of thirty.<sup>2</sup>

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1) *WA*, Tischreden, III, No. 3143b (May, 1532).

2) Chap. II, part I.

The twenty-eight year old Luther knew that as a preacher he would be expected to live up to the noble traditions of the preacher's office — traditions that had grown up through centuries of experience and achievement until in his own time preaching was more widely practiced and more eagerly listened to than it had ever been before. It was not an office to be lightly assumed.

Fortunately, Staupitz was able to persuade his young friend to become a preacher in spite of his fears. The account of how Luther, once having accepted the preaching office, not only upheld the prestige which it enjoyed but raised it, will form the chief content of this study. But in order to establish the advances he made over his predecessors, it will first be necessary to consider the debt he owes them. Only then can a just valuation be placed on both his achievement and theirs.

#### A Historical Survey of Preaching in Germany during the Middle Ages

There was no independent, indigenous preaching in Germany before the thirteenth century. In the four hundred years from the death of Boniface to the death of Bernard there were probably not more than half a dozen preachers whose names have come down to us, and every one of these leaned heavily upon the Greek and Latin fathers, not only for his sermonic material but for his sermons as well. This does not mean to say that there was no preaching. On the contrary, Germany had been Christianized in no small measure by preaching. The missionary sermon, which sought to impart to its hearers only the most necessary facts of salvation — the might of God and the me-



diation of the church — continued until the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when, with the conversion of the Pomeranians and the Prussians, all of Germany had been brought within the pale of Christianity. But side by side with this type there were other kinds of sermons which attempted to give the hearer a wider knowledge of his faith, and still others, increasingly popular as time went on, which attempted to raise him to a higher level of morality.

The thirteenth century was a period of flowering. But the buds which opened in such profusion had been growing for a hundred years. Since preaching is the cause as well as the result of great movements, it is not surprising that we should find a reciprocal influence between the sermons and the movements of the time. When we think of the first Crusade, for instance, we think of Pope Urban II and his sermon at Clermont and of the wandering preacher, Peter the Hermit. The second Crusade is indissolubly linked with Bernard's sermons. Both Crusades might be called responses to preaching.

But in their turn the Crusades did their share in introducing the itinerant preacher and the popular, outdoor sermon. They injected new spirit and content into preaching. The holy land, bearing the cross for Christ's sake, and general promises of indulgence for those who followed the sacred banners became topics of intense interest.

The Albigenses and Waldenses and other sects of the twelfth century were an even greater stimulus to preaching within the church, just as these sects themselves were in part the result of unauthorized lay preaching. Some one more efficient than the slow-footed and slow-minded parish priest was needed to



thrust back the threatening inundation. The preaching orders, learned Dominicans and popular Franciscans and Augustinians, endowed by their papal master with extraordinary privileges to preach when and where they pleased, performed this task thoroughly.

Equally important for the sermon were scholasticism and mysticism. The first displaced the old homily or running commentary style of sermon and impressed upon preaching a form which in greater or lesser measure it will very likely always retain. The second added the emotional and personal element at a time when preaching tended to become too abstract and pseudo-learned.

The great social and spiritual phenomena of these centuries made their first appearance in France and Italy. By the middle of the thirteenth century, however, German preaching showed the influence of the new currents of thought and feeling. Caesarius of Heisterbach and Albert the Great represent the scholastic tendency in their sermons. The Franciscan, Berthold of Regensburg, the greatest preacher before Luther, combined in himself most of the good parts of the itinerant mendicants: their homely eloquence, the dramatic arrangement of their material, their concrete applications, and their fervid call to repentance. Meister Eckhart, the great philosopher preacher, and his two more practically inclined pupils, John Tauler and Henry Suso, preached sermons of mystic depth and warmth, which so greatly appealed to Luther.

During the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries another element was reintroduced into the preaching of the church. The voice of criticism and discontent broke forth with renewed power and was never to be quite silenced before the Reformation.

This time no mendicant orders were able, and no secular kings inclined, to destroy the intransigents root and branch. The names of Wiclif and Huss may stand as symbols of this spirit in the early days. In Germany where the influence of these men was negligible, the spirit manifested itself in such preachers as John of Wesel and in an attenuated form in the satiric sermons of Geiler of Kaisersberg.

Finally, there were two other influences each of which helped in a modest way to mould the pre-Reformation sermon. The first emanated from the Brethren of the Common Life, that group of devoted men who inaugurated what has been called the Christian Renaissance. Their founder, Gerhard Groote, had begun his career by preaching. The brethren had sermons among themselves, called collations, which were characterized by unwonted length, great simplicity, and emphasis on the inwardness of life. Their ablest exponent was John Veghe of Westphalia.

The second influence came from Humanism. North of the Alps it was beneficial to the sermon. The Humanists aimed to eliminate formalism, excessive ornamentation, and the cramming together of disjointed and unedifying facts from the sermons of the time. In its purest form their ideals are contained in Erasmus's treatise on homiletics, but they also underlie the works of Dungersheim and Surgant.<sup>1</sup>

The great majority of German sermonizers of the fifteenth century were continuing in the traditional path broken two hundred years before. Still there was progress. Preachers and sermons were becoming so common that one Protestant scholar can state that there never was a time in Germany when there was more

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1) See bibliography for titles.

preaching in the church than shortly before the Reformation.<sup>1</sup> Preachers were also far better trained and could handle the technique of their art far more skillfully than in previous times. Their sermons gave full evidence of their wider education and interests. They took all knowledge to be their province. In their naive, uncritical way they garnered in facts, or what passed for facts, from every science and from every phase of life and used them with effect. There was at the same time a tendency to adapt all this material to the level of the unlearned man. Thus we have the double characteristic of formalism and popularity in the sermon of this period.<sup>2</sup>

Most famous among the late Medieval sermonizers were a group of men all of whose initial names happened to be John.<sup>3</sup> Among the half dozen Latin sermon magazines which came into existence during the first half of the fifteenth century and enjoyed great popularity during the second half, none had more influence than the *Dormi Secure* — Sleep securely (!) — sermons of the Franciscan, John of Werden, and the *Discipuli* sermons of the Dominican, John Herolt. The first appeared in twenty-four, the second in thirty-six, editions before 1500. Since an edition consisted of about 250 books and since most of these were sold to preachers, one can easily calculate from how many pulpits these ser-

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1) R. Cruel, *Geschichte d. deutschen Predigt*, (Detmold, 1879), p. 651. The statement is based upon the actual number of sermons preached, not on their distribution. Some churches, especially in the country, had little or no preaching. Others again, notably in some cities, had one or two sermons every day during certain periods of the year. To these must be added the sermons preached in cloisters and monasteries and out in the open.

2) This observation, made by Bezold, is quoted by F. Landmann, *D. Predigtwesen in Westfalen* (Muenster, 1900), p. 105.

3) If the great fourteenth century mystic preacher, John Tauler, and the devout preacher of the Brethren, John Veghe (there is only a single legend in all his extant sermons) be included, there are eight Johns in all.

mons were re-echoed. The second is especially noted for its interest in the practical life of the time, for its outspokenness in matters of sex,<sup>1</sup> and for its *exempla*, one of which forms the last part of nearly every one of its over two hundred sermons.

The most popular and famous preacher of Germany between Berthold and Luther was John Geiler of Kaisersberg, who occupied the pulpit of the Strasbourg Cathedral for over thirty years until his death in 1510. His sermons were published in numerous editions, usually by other men who used his notes as a basis for their reconstructions. They reflect all the customs of the people and of the preachers of his age. Because of his satires on the church, he has often been reckoned among the reformers before the Reformation. But he was a critic only of the practices, not of the doctrines of the church. His appeal was popular rather than profound, and he entertained more than he moved. His historic significance is that he used the sermon to scourge the church which he sought in vain to reform.

The very opposite of Geiler was the fourth John in this list, Jenser of Paltz. A brilliant teacher of the Erfurt Augustinians, his sermons, gathered in two collections, the *Celifodina* (Quarry of Heaven) and the *Supplementum Celifodinae*, represent the most extreme expressions of late medieval views on indulgences and saint worship. Even John Tetzel, whose notoriety, judging from the few extant fragments of his preaching,<sup>2</sup> has probably been exaggerated, pales before the extremist Paltz. In one of his academic sermons before

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1) The subject has been treated by W. Walther, "Das sechste Gebot in J. Herolts Predigten," *NKZ*, 1892, p. 485.

2) Printed in W. Koehler, *Documente zum Ablassstreit von 1517*. Tuebingen, 1902.

the University, Paltz has also contributed a "museum piece" of a learned sermon, in which the material has been hairsplit and subdivided almost to infinity.<sup>1</sup>

The sermons of John Staupitz are of especial interest because of their author's influence on Luther. They enjoyed wide popularity even after the public appearance of the Reformer. Staupitz was at home on the pulpit. He preferred the sermon form for the development and presentation of his ideas, and most of his writings are simply elaborations of his sermon notes. His sermons are characterized by their warm inspirational tone (this was his heritage from mysticism), their interpretations of Scripture, and their treatment of certain dogmatic problems. The last is of historic importance, for the implications of his own dogmatic views came to fruition in the mind of his great pupil.

A word must finally be said about the anonymous compilations appearing between the years 1473-1521 and called *Plenarien*, because of the wealth of material — Scripture lessons, parts of the mass liturgy, sermons—which they contain. The purpose of these books was to help the reading layman, and also the lesser priest, to a better understanding of the Mass and of the Scriptures and to provide him with material for practicing his devotional life in private. The sermons (called glosses) are informal and lack organization, but they are edifying in the good sense. The wide distribution of these *Plenarien* (especially in Southern Germany — there were seventy-five German editions in all) must have measurably enhanced the religious life and knowledge of the people.

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1) Printed in *SVRG*, No. 63, pp. 54 ff.



## The Number, Language, and Transmission of Late Medieval Sermons in Germany

After the foregoing historical summary attention will now be directed to the details of the sermon as it existed in the hundred years before Luther. The first questions to be answered concern the number of sermons preached and extant, the language in which they were spoken, and the manner of their transmission to posterity.

Cruel's statement about their frequency has just been noted. Landmann made a very thorough examination of the evidence of preaching in Westphalia between the years 1378-1517. He listed the following findings: sermon collections of seventy preachers whose names are known; an equal number of anonymous collections; at least one hundred manuscript volumes of sermons; 10,000 different sermons printed in incunabula, to say nothing of the manuscripts which had come down from previous centuries, and collections from neighboring provinces. Since similar results are found by other scholars for other parts of Germany and of Europe,<sup>1</sup> we are safe in reiterating the statement that preaching had become very common. Further, in the list of questions which Surgant supplies for the convenience of the episcopal parish visitors this one is included: "Does the priest preach regularly?"<sup>2</sup>

Authorities are also in virtual agreement that the medieval sermon was always preached to the people in the language of the people. It is true that most of the sermons that have come down to us are in Latin.

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1) A few of these are A. Meyer, for Breslau and vicinity; Luzian Pfleger, for Strasbourg; H. Rauscher, for Wuerttemberg; L. de la Marche, for France; G. Owst, for England; Zawart, for Franciscan preaching. For all the names mentioned, see the bibliography.

2) Part ii, consid. 20.



In the last hundred years, however, large numbers of German sermons have been unearthed in the libraries. There is also evidence to show that those now extant only in Latin were originally preached in the vernacular (with the exception of the sermons preached before clerics). Since Latin was the language of the educated in those days, the preacher would naturally be inclined to use it if he wished to preserve his sermons for his brethren or for posterity. Luther wrote his early sermons in Latin, though we know that he preached in German to the Wittenbergers after 1514. But whenever the sermons were gathered for the specific needs of the people, or of untrained parish priests, as in the case of the *Plenarien*, only the German language was used.

That every priest, no matter how heavily he leaned on his Latin authors or sermon books, translated whatever he used into the language of the people, may also be gathered from the copious rules offered by Dungersheim and Surgant for translating Latin sources — especially Scripture passages — into the vernacular.<sup>1</sup> In his introduction Dungersheim states that one of the objects of the preacher's training is to accustom himself to translate for the people what he has found in the language of the learned.

These facts are borne out indirectly by what we know of medieval methods of preserving sermons in writing. A very common way during the Middle Ages was for some nun or monk or other admirer to take

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1) Dungersheim, chap. ii, part vi; Surgant, part i, consid. 18. Dungersheim's rules can be resolved chiefly into the following two: 1. The translation must be clear. 2. It should not offend by blunt or vulgar terms. Even the sentence, "Verbum caro factum est" should be translated "God was made man" (not flesh). Surgant's fourteen rules are of the same tenor. He would prefer the translation "sitzet zu der Gerechten [rather than Rechten] Gottes" because he believed, as Luther later did, that the risen Christ was not confined to one place.

notes during or shortly after the sermon and later to expand them from memory. The notes would very likely be taken in Latin, because there had been developed an embryonic shorthand for that language. The reconstruction would be either in Latin or German.<sup>1</sup> A second method of preservation was for the preacher or someone else to use the Latin notes he had made in preparing his sermon as the basis for the later written versions.<sup>2</sup>

When the preacher later wrote out his own sermons, these versions were often as far from the original spoken speech as the reconstructions of strangers. The reasons for this fact are not difficult to find. First, the preacher usually set to work so long after the sermon had been given that his memory was not absolutely fresh. Furthermore, he toned down the passages which were most spicy, or racy, or only of local or temporary pertinence. Finally, since his object almost always was to furnish a sermonic magazine for his less gifted brethren rather than an example of his own style of preaching, he padded his sermon with stores of knowledge which the user might utilize in what measure he desired. His product gained in some respects, but lost the informal living quality of the actually delivered sermon.<sup>3</sup>

### The Preacher, and the Place, Manner, Time, and Occasions of Preaching

The church laid down only two standards for the

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1) Most of Berthold's and Luther's and some of Geiler's and Staupitz's sermons were preserved in this way. Sometimes there were lacunae in the note-taker's notes as well as in his memory. Then his imagination would be called upon to supply what was lacking. Thus there is a problem of authenticity connected with many of the sermons of these men.

2) In the case of Geiler both his own Latin notes and the reconstructions of others on the basis of them have come down to us.

3) Certain topics could be treated with greater frankness in Latin and were undoubtedly toned down when used in a sermon to the people. In a sense one might thus say that the written sermon was spicier than the spoken one.

preacher in medieval times. But these two were infrangible. The preacher must be a cleric;<sup>1</sup> secondly, he must have the proper call.<sup>2</sup> In the olden times the bishop was looked upon as the natural preacher. Gradually the parish priest (soon after Charlemagne) and then the monk (beginning with the time of Bernard and Norbert) began to supplant him, until in the fifteenth century it was unusual for a bishop to ascend a pulpit. Some one of his canons or assistants usually substituted for him when he was called upon to preach. The practice in monasteries was for the brethren to appoint one of their number who had especial talent, as a preacher. Canons, though preaching in the first place to their chapters in the cathedral choirs, would not infrequently have a listening congregation in the nave besides. Their sermons were therefore often in the vernacular.

The preachers par excellence from the time of Francis and Dominic were the friars of the mendicant orders.<sup>3</sup> Nearly all the extant sermons of the Middle Ages are the work of friars. Deriving their authority from the head of Christendom and being independent of all other ecclesiastical or temporal jurisdiction, the mendicants traveled to and fro and up and down in the land to preach, to hear confessions, and to absolve. Their instructions were not to preach during the times of the parish mass or sermon. Yet as time went on, they often became involved in quarrels with the parish priests or with members of rival orders. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries their high moral purpose

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1) That is, he must either have taken orders or joined an order. But deacons and even sub-deacons were occasionally licensed by bishops.

2) Cf. Surgant, part i, consid. 1. Besides these, he lists sixteen other privileges, which are for the most part requirements. Dungersheim, chap. ii, part i, excludes women, poorly trained, heretics, the deformed, the lazy, and the too young from preaching.

3) Landmann, however, shows that toward the end of our period the older monastic orders also took up preaching, *op. cit.*, pp. 39-60.

began to fail and the desire to become entertaining took its place. They became the chief purveyors of superstitions and irrelevant legends and carried the worship of Mary and of the founders of their orders to extremes.<sup>1</sup>

The end of the period under discussion also saw the rise of the professional preacher. It was not uncommon in Southern Germany to create and endow special preaching positions in the larger churches, to which some talented speaker was then appointed. The incumbent was freed of the ordinary duties of the priest. Geiler, for instance, as cathedral preacher at Strasbourg, held such an endowed position.

Thus far we have spoken about the legitimate preachers. There were, however, many of another variety also. Since the Crusades, the traveling preacher had become an institution. Originally he had been carefully licensed to bring to thousands who could not fight in the Crusades the same indulgences in return for money to support them. He preached penance, heard confessions, and accepted money. The practice was too lucrative not to be imitated, in time, by a host of imposters, who went under various names, *clerici vagi*, *vagabundi*, *questionarii*, *goliardi*, *eberhardini*, *begardi*, *pardoners* (in England), and played upon the superstitions of the people and took what the traffic would bear. They were legislated against by the church, as were also the heretics and sectarians, who supplied the other source of the illegitimate preachers of the Middle Ages.<sup>2</sup>

It is not easy to determine the intellectual and moral

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1) Cf. M. Schian's article in the *PRE*, XV, 648, and Erasmus's numerous sarcasms about them in the *Praise of Folly*. The Franciscans and Augustinians were especially instrumental in developing Mariolatry.

2) Examples are the Albigenses and Waldenses, Wiclif's poor preachers, and the Hussite preachers. Besides these, there were visionaries and extremists, who arose at regular intervals.

equipment of the average fifteenth century preacher. Those men from whom we have sermons evidently stood in the front rank among the educated of their day and were patterns of morality. Every member of the clergy licensed to preach had at least been exposed to a theological education, which sometimes was given only by a parish priest in his parsonage but more often probably by trained teachers in a cathedral or cloister school or, later, in a university. But there was a wide divergence among individuals — as there is even to this day.

Both our writers of manuals complain that too often preachers were appointed who were faulty in both morals and knowledge. In his introduction Surgant defends his book against those who say that preaching comes directly through inspiration rather than through painstaking study. Each author lists some two dozen “don’ts,”<sup>1</sup> though most of these refer to form, content, and manner. It would seem that preachers of those times were especially prone to spitefulness, vulgarity, and vain display in the pulpit, that their application of the Word of God was sometimes too sharp, sometimes too lax. That severe criticisms of the clergy were proceeding from the pulpit is shown by the warnings of both writers never to criticize the clergy before the people. The place for such criticisms was in the Latin sermons and at the Synods. The caustic comments of Erasmus<sup>2</sup> against the preachers coincide pretty well with what has been said, if one makes due allowance for the famous Humanist’s excess sarcasm.

It is a well-known fact that many village priests were living in concubinage at this time, more perhaps

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1) Dungersheim, chap. ii, parts iii and vi. Surgant, part i, consid. 23.

2) Cf. *Praise of Folly* (London, 1887 edition), p. 150.



as a result of the German's love for a comfortable home and family than of immorality.<sup>1</sup> The village priest was also accused of intemperance, of spending more time on his crops than on his sermon, on his family than on his flock. The character of the whole age was one of effeteness and staleness. Preachers and their times were in need of a refreshing.

The normal place for the delivery of the sermon in the fifteenth century was the pulpit in the nave of the church. Self-evident as this may seem, it was not always so. The famous thirteenth century seems to have produced even the pulpit. Before that time the preacher addressed the congregation from a lectern, called the *ambo*, that stood behind the chancel rail in the choir.<sup>2</sup> Then, very likely for acoustical reasons, the preacher's rostrum was raised higher and moved out into the nave of the church, where it became the pulpit we have today. Nothing more than a crude and movable platform at first, it was eventually included in the building plans as an integral part of the church and, especially in Gothic churches, richly carved and ornamented.

Preaching out of doors was far more common in the Middle Ages than in later times. A favorite place for an itinerant to hold forth would be the market place, the cathedral square, or any open field near the town. After determining the quarter from which the wind came, the preacher would erect a small movable pulpit, call the people together by ringing the church bells, and proceed to deliver his sermon.

From statements frequently appended to sermons that the congregation is now to rise we may conclude that

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1) Cf. Ranke, *Deutsche Gesch. im Zeitalter d. Reformation* (Muenchen, 1926), II, 10.

2) The Latin name for this rail was *cancelli*, whence the German word for pulpit, *Kanzel*, is derived.



people usually sat for the sermon, though not always on chairs or benches. Both preacher and listeners sat during the sermon before monks in the chapter house of the monastery. But in addition to these private sermons there were regular preaching services in the cloister church. Since the monastery could usually boast of at least one skilled preacher, these services became very popular and sometimes drew away people from the parish sermon, as was the case at Liegnitz.<sup>1</sup>

There is no doubt that the late medieval preachers in Germany tried their best to reach the hearts of their hearers and that they succeeded, on the whole, in doing so. The methods employed were not always in the best taste, or as ridiculed by Erasmus, mere stage playing with toning, bawling, singing, squeaking, grimaces, making of mouths and ape faces, distorting of countenances,<sup>2</sup> but they were effective.

Both Surgant and Dungersheim devote long passages of their books to instructions for the delivery of the sermon. "How the orator speaks determines his influence even more than what he speaks," says the latter, quoting Augustine.<sup>3</sup> Both writers stress good memorization, one of them even offering a system of mnemonics for words, thoughts, and experiences.<sup>4</sup> Both also argue strongly against rapid speaking — "a physician can not cure his patient in transit."<sup>5</sup> The slow speaker seems to have been characteristic of the age. The constructive advice of the two men, drawn largely

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1) Cf. A. Meyer, *Studien zur Vorgesch. der Reformation in Breslau*. (Breslau, 1903), p. 82.

2) *Op. cit.*, p. 151.

3) Chap. ii, part i.

4) Surgant, part i, consid. 20; Dungersheim, chap. ii, part iii.

5) Surgant, part i, consid. 21; cf. Dungersheim, chap. ii, part vi. Geiler, as well as Luther, was a *tardiloquus*.

from Cicero and Augustine, is of the best and emphasizes that which is simple, sensible, and worthy of the gospel.

The traditional length of the fifteenth century sermon was one hour (*solita hora* — Dungersheim). In smaller places it was much shorter, while on festival occasions it might be longer. The Good Friday sermon came to be a sort of intermittent lecture, beginning early in the morning and lasting for from three to nine hours with people coming and going during the intermissions.

The normal time for the parish sermon was either before, during, or after the chief mass of the day, usually celebrated at nine or ten o'clock. The following times were also common: the early morning (in cloisters or on Good Fridays), the afternoon (wherever there were official preachers besides the priest, this was the rule — thus Geiler preached in the afternoon), the evening (during the vespers in either the chapter house or parish church or in the vigil before the high feast days). When there was a cloister and a parish church in the same town (as at Wittenberg), the preaching services were arranged so as not to conflict with one another. The traveling preacher chose any time that suited him best and interfered least with local services and customs.

The abnormal increase in the number of festival days before the Reformation furnished the preacher with plenty of occasions to practice his calling. In addition to the regular Sunday and festival sermons (called *sermones de tempore* or *s. dominicales*), there were sermons for saints' days<sup>1</sup> (*sermones de sanctis*), daily

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1) The *Dormi Secure* collection has over sixty, the *Discipuli* more than fifty sermons for saints' days. About forty festival and saints' days were mandatory. An equal number of other occasions were customarily graced with a sermon. (Cf. A. Linzenmayer, *Geschichte d. Predigt* (München, 1886), p. 131.)

sermons during Lent (*quadragesimalia*), extra sermons during Advent (*adventualia*), indulgence sermons, the special favorites of the itinerants, and the whole host of occasional sermons — for New Year, dedications, consecrations, anniversaries, processions, pilgrimages, academic formalities, and burials.

Sermon types may thus be determined by the occasions for which they were intended. The regular Sunday sermon was nearly always built upon the ancient gospel or epistle lections.<sup>1</sup> The saint sermon was more often a meditation on some abstract virtue in which the saint was supposed to have excelled than a mere rehashing of the legends about the saint. The Lenten sermons, besides exerting a powerful influence on the lives of the people, also did their share in popularizing the sermon series (*Reihenpredigten*), of which Geiler and Luther furnish so many examples. The latter were closely related to the so-called Catechism Sermons — on the commandments, the creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Ave Maria, the seven deadly sins, or the seven sacraments. The New Year's sermon underwent an interesting development. Its content was gradually shifted from the circumcision and naming of Christ to thoughts connected with the beginning of the New Year. A favorite device was to single out the individual estates of Christendom and give each one a present in the form of a pertinent admonition. Funeral sermons began to appear soon after 1200, but they had not become common even at the end of the Reformation period.

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1) These lections, often called lessons or pericopes, consisted of appropriate Scripture readings for every Sunday and festival day of the church year, or Christian year. The gospel lections were chosen from the four Gospels, the Epistle lections from Acts and the Apostolical letters. Both had been in general use in the church before the time of Gregory the Great. In a correctly orientated church and correctly appointed service the Gospel lections were read on the north, the Epistles on the south, side of the altar.

From the point of view of composition Cruel laid down the classic divisions for the medieval sermon.<sup>1</sup> These divisions had to some extent been anticipated by Surgant and Dungersheim,<sup>2</sup> the first of whom divides sermons into five, the latter into ten classes. But they evidently did not have as clear a perception of the sermon types of their own times as scholars have now. Cruel's chief types are six in number.

The first is the ancient homily in which a longer text was expounded verse by verse. It was dethroned by the scholastic method of outlining but not altogether displaced, for it survives even to this day. Cruel divided the scholastic method into two major forms, which he called the textual and the thematic, depending on whether the outline was based directly on the text (like branches rising immediately from the roots) or on a theme deduced from the text (like branches rising from a trunk, which in its turn communicates with the roots). But each of these two he once more divided into two kinds. Thereby he arrived at the next four types of the medieval sermon.

The textual sermon might deal with a Scriptural passage or only with a short verse. Thus one can speak of a textual pericope<sup>3</sup> and a textual verse sermon.<sup>4</sup>

Far more numerous are the thematic sermons, subdivided into the doctrinal and the figurative (or emble-

1) Cruel, *op. cit.*, pp. 279 ff.

2) Surgant, part i, consid. 6. Dungersheim, chap. ii, part iii.

3) A sermon on the text of the Easter gospel, according to St. Mark, quoted by Alzog from one of the *Plenarien*, may serve as an example. The parts are: 1. The earnest diligence which the women show in seeking the Lord. 2. The true resurrection of the Lord. 3. The comforting words of the angel ("Tell his disciples and Peter").

4) This type is illustrated by a sermon on St. Katherine in the *Dormi Secure*. The text is Esther 2:17: "And the king loved Esther above all women." Three things are noted: 1. The *dilectio viscerosa* ("loved Esther"). 2. The *dignitas generosa* ("the king"). 3. The *numeratio copiosa* ("above all women").

matic) varieties. The first is nothing more than the well-known sermon with theme and parts, still perhaps the most widely used of all forms.<sup>1</sup> In the emblematic outline the theme and its parts are replaced by an image and certain of its features. It was one of Geiler's favorite mechanisms. He compares the devil to a lion or death to a *Dorfmeier* and builds up his sermon on the fancied likenesses between them. Surgant recommends the emblematic outline in the warmest terms.<sup>2</sup> Like the pictures on the walls and in the windows of churches this picture sermon undoubtedly was well fitted to convey spiritual truths to the childlike mind of the medieval man.

The last chief type that Cruel presents might be called the unorganized, conglomerate sermon. Surgant included it among his five fundamental forms and said it was the one most widely used. It was common among the general run of preachers and in the *Plenarien*.

Besides these there were other types — most of them variations of the six given. Dungersheim suggests that the parts of a sermon may sometimes be gained by treating some name in the text etymologically or by breaking it up into its component letters and finding words that may stand for them.<sup>3</sup> The resulting Name or Letter sermons were favorites with many preachers. The ludicrous philology of the first method was per-

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1) The Maundy Thursday sermon in the *Dormi Secure* on the text of the footwashing (John 13) is a doctrinally thematic sermon. Christ gives four examples: 1. Of cleansing in *lavando*. 2. Of love in *cernendo*. 3. Of humility in *ministrando*. 4. Of vocation in *predicando*.

2) With the text, "God hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness" (Ps. 45:7), he would make a fourfold comparison between oil and grace. Both have the *virtutem mitigativam, sanativam, illuminativam, and dulcorativam*. Part i, consid. 16. The same illustration occurs in Dungersheim, chap. ii, part iv, no. 9. A less praiseworthy example is the following from Gottschalk Hollen: "Christus fuit verbum indicativum, imperativum, optativum, coniunctivum, infinitivum." These he compares to the incarnation, the miracles, the love, the resurrection, and the ascension of Christ.

3) Chap. ii, part iii, no. 6.



haps excusable in the light of the pious theology it served. A classic example was used by Geiler who derived the word *Bischof* from *Beisschaf*.<sup>1</sup> The *Legenda Aurea* derives Laurentius from *lauream tenens*—one who holds the crown of laurel — and Pancratius from *pan-gratus-citius* — full of grace soon (at an early age).

Closely allied to the Letter sermons were the Number sermons, in which a name like Mary or Jesus would be analyzed with all the devout mathematical legerdemain of the time.<sup>2</sup>

The fourfold sense that was supposed to lie behind every passage of Scripture was very well adapted to forcing even the most ordinary text to yield an unsuspectedly colorful outline. Plenty of examples of this kind of procedure will be noted in the study of Luther.

#### Formality and Form in Connection with the Sermons<sup>3</sup>

The fifteenth century preacher observed certain formalities in the pulpit similar to those which are still in vogue at the present day. He usually appeared in the pulpit dressed in a cassock and surplice with a biretta upon his head. If he was a monk, he would of course wear the garb of his order. After a short silent prayer, during which he removed his cap, he would cross himself and greet the congregation with the words: "In nomine patris et filii et spiritus sancti." Then he would recite, in Latin also, his *thema*, or text — if it

1) Another equally ludicrous example comes from P. Comestor (12. cent.) who said "Eva" was compounded of the two sounds a newborn child utters, "E" and "Ah" (Albert, *Geich. d. Predigt* [Guetersloh, 1892], III, 20). Orvet (*Literature and Pulpit* . . . [Cambridge, 1933], p. 248) tells of one in which Tunia was derived from "Tu non es" (namely what thou once wert). A good example of the Letter sermon would be to make the letters of the name "Maria" stand for the words: *Mediatrix, alleviatrix, reparatrix, illuminatrix, auxiliatrix*.

2) For instance, the name Maria has three syllables, which represent the Trinity. The five letters stand for five virtues. Multiplied, these two numbers give fifteen, the number of the Psalms of Degrees, etc., etc.

3) Based chiefly on instructions given in Surgant's treatise.



consisted of one verse. The *thema* might coincide with the theme, as it always does in the *Dormi Secure* sermons, but not necessarily so.

Ordinarily there would now follow a German pulpit greeting, a prayer (usually the Ave Maria), the reading or reciting of the gospel<sup>1</sup> (Surgant urges the reading of the gospel even when the sermon is based on the epistle), and the exordium. The latter was meant to be an introduction to the text rather than to the sermon.<sup>2</sup> Not infrequently it was a little sermon in itself. It appears in its typical form in the *Dormi Secure* sermons. Their author, like a good many other preachers, loved to begin his exordium with a quotation from Aristotle.<sup>3</sup>

The exordium was followed by a recitation of the theme parts, usually in Latin and in rhymes.<sup>4</sup> The latter were sacrificed when the parts were repeated in German a minute later. There were rarely less than three or more than five parts to a thematic sermon. At this point the preacher might ask his congregation to join in the singing of some well-known stanza, called a *Ruf* or *Leis*.<sup>5</sup> But this practice was generally abandoned in our period. The long introduction over, the preacher could finally devote himself to his sermon, which will be scrutinized more closely under the next heading.

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1) A point of pride with some preachers was to recite it from memory.

2) The exordium appears in some Lutheran preachers as late as Fresenius (d. 1761). It is called *Eingang* by him.

3) Thus in the sermon for St. John on the text, "This is the disciple whom Jesus loves," Aristotle is quoted as saying: "*Amicitia est benevolentia mutua.*" For the text, "A lion which is the strongest among beasts and turneth not away" (sermon for St. Mark) the following not quite so germane sentence is culled from the sayings of the Stagirite: "The bones of the lion are harder than any other, for when they are struck together fire comes forth." Aristotle was quoted either by name or simply as *philosophus*.

4) Rhymes were used to aid the memory. Dictionaries for rhymed sermon parts were in existence.

5) Cf. Dungersheim, chap. ii, part iii.

A characteristic of medieval preaching was to quote all Bible passages in Latin<sup>1</sup> and then repeat them in the vernacular. Even the German *Plenarien* follow this convention, which is irritating to the modern reader but seems to have been a token of added authenticity to the medieval listener.

When the preacher wished to address his people during the sermon he used expressions like "your love," "your devotion," "my beloved," "my children." At the end of his parts he would be very likely to make some remark like: "So much for that" (Luther regularly does), or he might add the following advice: "Who wishes, may now clear his throat."<sup>2</sup> Less dignified preachers told funny stories when they noticed their hearers falling asleep.

The conclusion of the sermon, in direct contrast to the beginning, was surprisingly abrupt. The reason for the hurried close evidently lay in the fact that the intercessions, prayers, and announcements which now followed were looked upon as almost an integral part of the sermon.<sup>3</sup> Some village preachers made their sermons only fifteen minutes long and spent their time stringing out the announcements.<sup>4</sup> What came after the sermon proper may be grouped under the three categories of liturgy, intercessions, announcements. The first category comprised the confession of faith — very often also the reciting of the Ten Commandments, the confession of sins, and the indulgence or absolution. The intercessions were the following: for the dead,

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1) The custom does not seem to have been altogether abandoned during the Reformation. Latimer still observes it in his sermons.

2) Surgant, part ii, consid. 1.

3) Roerer's notes on Luther's sermons end thus abruptly evidently for the reason given.

4) Geiler once satirized their practice in a sermon for Palm Sunday in his postil. Cf. Dungersheim, chap. ii, part vii, caution 19.

for the living, for all classes of people and for the church,<sup>1</sup> ending with the Lord's Prayer and the Ave Maria. Under the third category were included announcements of marriage bans, of excommunications, or cancelling of excommunications, of special citations, of episcopal or papal communications, and of festival, fasting, and saints' days during the week, with the amount of indulgence obtainable in each case. The last feature was salted with admonitions, lest the people, in an age when calendars were scarce, should unwittingly sin by feasting when they ought to be fasting or miss the chance of winning a hundred days' indulgence.

Local announcements would undoubtedly often swell the list we have given. But there is an end to everything, and so the fifteenth century preacher would at last come to his "Dixi" or "Amen," which signified the close of the pulpit communications. Presumably he would then again bow his head in prayer and cross himself before he descended and proceeded to his place in the choir.<sup>2</sup>

### Content of the Sermon

The content of a sermon depends chiefly on the availability of a certain amount of usable raw material and of a technique with which to appropriate that material for the purpose at hand. The fifteenth century preacher possessed both material and technique in rich measure. Let us glance first at the technique.

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1) The general church prayer given in Surgant differs in no essential point (if the prayer for the pope be omitted) from the one in general use in the Lutheran Church today. Where the latter prays for the protection of those who travel by land and sea, the first reads "fuer alle bilger und bilgerin so uff dem gotsweg sind."

3) The order described here was not a hard and fast one. In Basel the prayers for the dead were spoken before the sermon. People would come in time to hear the names of their deceased friends and relatives read and thus not be late for the sermon. (Surgant, part ii, consid. 7.)

Our two homiletical theorists have defined it very succinctly in their books, both of them having chapters dealing with rules for the amplification of sermons and for the use of rhetorical devices (*colores rhetoricales*).<sup>1</sup> The first two suggestions set down by Dungersheim are: 1) To quote an authority for the confirmation of what one has said; 2) To apply the fourfold sense (chiefly the allegorical) to Scripture texts.

These two, authority and allegory, are nothing less than the tutelar deities of the medieval preacher. The first provided him with factual, the second with visionary proof. Where we today would build up an argument to prove a point, he simply slapped down a quotation. While we concede the esthetic and persuasive force of allegory, we know it to be a figment of the imagination. But the medieval preacher applied the ontological proof not only to God but to the allegory and concluded that because it was conceivable it must be real. This belief could make him behold reality after reality opening up beneath a trite word or line.

The rest of the advice of Dungersheim and Surgant is not specifically medieval but represents those solid rhetorical principles which have stood the test of time and are taught (a little less mechanically to be sure) in our courses in rhetoric today. More detailed reports of how this technique was actually carried into effect will be shown in discussing certain of Luther's early sermons.

For the raw material of the sermon the preacher might go, roughly speaking, to six sources; to the Bible, to theological literature based on the Bible, to collections of legends, to profane literature, to contemporary life, and to nature. In the vast majority of cases, how-

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1) Dungersheim, chap. ii, parts iv and v. Surgant, part i, consid. 6.

ever, he went only to four. His knowledge of profane literature did not extend far beyond the excerpts which appeared in a few standard encyclopedic works, in saints' legends, or in sermon books,<sup>1</sup> and nature to him meant only bookish lore.

Contrary to the opinion formerly held within Protestant churches, the late medieval preacher was well-versed in the Scriptures. In the first chapter of his book Dungersheim re-echoes the sentiments expressed in several other theological treatises of the time when he writes these fine words about the preacher's relation to Holy Writ:

If they desire to be shepherds of the flock of Christ, the word of God provides them with the only pasture and nourishment for the flock; if they would be physicians of souls, the word of God offers the only remedy . . . ; if they would be spiritual leaders of the congregation, God's word is the sword they must be able to wield . . . . How then can they accomplish this task without a thorough knowledge of this same word and unless they have studiously acquired and practiced the art of using it rightly?<sup>2</sup>

The preacher's training had indeed been based mainly on the Bible. His texts were taken from it, and rarely did he make a major statement without adducing some verse from Scripture in proof. In fact, the pre-Reformation sermon bristled with Biblical quotations drawn from a wide range of Old and New Testament and Apocryphal books.

These facts accord well with what is now known

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1) Geilor's use of contemporary literature in basing a series of sermons on Sebastian's Brant's *Narrenschiff* was an exception. At that, since Brant's poem was a satire on contemporary life, Geiler was referring to life rather than to literature.

2) This is the translation given in Dr. Reu's book: *Luther's German Bible* (Columbus, Ohio, 1934), p. 57.



about the wide distribution of the Bible in both German and Latin before the Reformation.<sup>1</sup> Besides the complete Bible, there were editions of the Psalms, of the pericopes (*Plenarien*), of the Passion history (*Passionalia*), and of History Bibles, in which was recounted the Biblical history, mainly of the Old Testament. There were also a large number of Biblical helps like concordances (the first one was composed by Hugo of St. Caro, d. 1261), commentaries (one of the most famous was that of Nicolas de Lyra, d. 1340), dictionaries of the Vulgate, and last but not least, sermon books.

But the preacher of the Middle Ages drew on other sources besides the Bible. Those of the theological variety consisted of the writings of the ancient church fathers, the sentences of the great teachers of later times, parts of the liturgy, and even the Biblical stories depicted in the pictures in churches. The fathers quoted most often were Augustine, Gregory, Jerome, and Chrysostom. The most popular of the medieval teachers were Bernard, Peter Lombard (usually quoted only as "the Authority" or "the Master"), Anselm, Hugo St. Victor, Bonaventura, and, among the later ones, Gerson. Be it added that the quotations from Scripture as a rule outnumbered those from the fathers. The ratio by actual count of a representative number of sermons in the *Discipuli* is three to two for the Sunday sermons but about the opposite in the sermons for

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1) This subject is treated in detail in Dr. Reu's book, just cited. The outstanding facts are these: There were fourteen editions of the Bible in High German and four in Low German from the date of the invention of printing to the Reformation. Over 20,000 copies of the Latin Bible were printed before 1500. Besides, there appeared 60 editions of the Psalter in Latin and twenty in German, 65 editions of High German and 19 of Low German *Plenaria* (also a few in Latin), 12 editions of Story Bibles and almost as many of the *Biblia Pauperum* (picture Bibles). This does not include manuscript Bibles, of which some 36,000 were produced during the Middle Ages.



saints. A count of the quotations in the *Plenarien* glosses in Alzog show about three Scripture passages to two from the fathers, while one long academic sermon of Paltz has thirty-eight patristic and thirty-two Scriptural references. In Geiler the number of each is about equal.

The third great mine of source material for the preacher of those times was the legend in all its divers forms and collections. Technically it was known as the *exemplum*<sup>1</sup> and varied in length from a single line to several pages (the average length was about eight lines). In quality the *exempla* ranged from those which had almost canonical standing or were gems of wisdom to those which were nothing less than obscene.<sup>2</sup> Originally they were purely narrative in character. Later there was added to the narrative part an interpretive part or moralization which came to be looked on as more important than the story itself. The number of these *exempla* ran into the thousands. They had been patiently gathered from every imaginable source (apocryphal writings, the fathers, profane history and literature, science so-called, and personal experience) into several dozens of compendia for the benefit of the preacher, who drew on them freely for illustrative ma-

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1) For standard works on the *exemplum*, see the bibliography. The term is not always defined in the wide sense we have taken, as including all legends and illustrations.

2) To the first class belonged the dozens of legends about Mary and the ever recurring one about the ten choirs of angels, one of which had fallen from its high estate to become the Satanic host. Its place in heaven was to be taken by saved human beings.

Fine illustrative power is shown in a story like this: A certain man poured water into an unclean basin and emptied it. The water was lost but the basin was cleansed. This is compared to the mind of a simple Christian who does not retain the Word of God but is cleansed by it, nevertheless.

A legend of the questionable variety tells how a certain priest was wont to call upon the Virgin's name before he made his regular visits to his mistress. One night on the way there he missed his step on a narrow bridge, fell into the river, and was drowned. The devil claimed his soul, but Mary, flattered because he had not forgotten her in the midst of his amorous adventures, succeeded in getting him by the pearly gates.

terial. Among the most widely used collections were those of Gregory the Great, Caesarius of Heisterbach, Jacob of Vitry, Jacob of Voragine (*Legenda Aurea*), Vincent of Beauvais (*Speculum Historiae*), John Gobii Junior (*Scala Coeli*), and the *Vitae Patrum*, the *Gesta Romanorum* (moralized legends), and the *Promptuarium* (by Herolt, the author of the *Discipuli* sermons).

Fascinating and ludicrous at the same time was the treatment of nature in the sermons of the Middle Ages. The preacher could turn, as in literature and history, to dozens of compendia, where he might choose choice bits for the mosaic of his sermon from pseudo-scientific accounts about birds, quadrupeds, fishes, minerals, gems, plants, geography, foreign races. The most famous compendium was called the *Physiologus*. It consisted of a number of moralized descriptions of animals, probably based on what was current zoological science in Alexandria in the second century.<sup>1</sup> The preacher looked at nature not with his ordinary eye but with a sort of second vision. A study of the animal or vegetable world for its own sake went quite beyond his sphere of interest. He cared only for the symbol which he believed lay behind the fact. Once he had found this symbol, or moral meaning, his interest in nature ceased. For the sake of the moral he could accept the most miraculous accounts of natural — or unnatural — phenomena without batting an eye.

But the preacher did not stop at these specifically

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1) Some of the stories went back to Aristotle's book on animals. The collection was often cited as "Master Physiologus." Owst quotes a sample of it from a nameless sermon in medieval English which is too amusing not to pass on. The moralization is missing in this case.

"An Olyvawnte . . . hathe no joyntes in his lymmys, and therefore he may never bowe; and when that he wyll reste hym he lenythe him to a tree. And so, when that men ben in purpose for to take hym, then when he is absent, they go and cutt this tree almoste a-two. And when this beste is dysposed for to go and reste hym, then he gothe to this tree and lenythe there to; and then sodenly he fallyth down, and so he is taken. And by no meyns he may not aryse, by cawse that he has no joyntes."

homiletical sources. Why should he? Contemporay literature and history, the sciences and arts, political and social affairs, personal experience — may they not be legitimately used for illustration and background? The sermons of preachers like Hollen, Herolt, and Geiler became mirrors of the time in which they were given because their authors were fond of this type of material. If these men occasionally dealt out almost too many morsels of earthly wisdom along with the bread of life, one is inclined to excuse them when one remembers that people in those days had no newspapers or lectures and relatively few books through which to imbibe information.

Broadly speaking, the content of the medieval sermon was ethical rather than doctrinal or polemical. Yet certain faults were regularly criticized, though the degrees varied with different preachers. A few, like John of Wesel, attacked even the doctrine of the church. Geiler and others were strong in denouncing demoralized conditions among monks and clergy. Objects of universal opprobrium with the sermonizers were: Jews and heretics, usury, luxury in clothes, gaming,<sup>1</sup> dancing, drunkenness,<sup>2</sup> and the practice of superstition, the last in spite of the fact that the sermon itself was steeped in demonology and superstition. The church approved of some kinds and frowned upon others.

There were also less laudable features in the content of the fifteenth century sermon. A lack of taste

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1) A Christmas sermon in the *Discipuli* is given over to this vice. Cf. *infra*, p. 62.

2) *Kirchweih* ought to be called *Kuechweih*, says Geiler. Luther also has much to say on this subject.

was often exhibited in subject matter and presentation.<sup>1</sup> Preachers spoke about things, for instance, in connection with the birth of Christ, which would offend modern audiences.<sup>2</sup> They introduced revolting and fantastic details into the Passion history. They injected silly and even risque jokes into the Easter sermon, in order to help their hearers be merry after the long sombre Lenten period (*risus paschalis*).<sup>3</sup> Sometimes their language and their manners were unrefined according to our standards. Some of the indulgence preachers and many of the itinerants in the latest period used high-powered methods to extract money from the people, which comported badly with the seriousness of the message they were supposed to preach. In certain churches of Breslau the pulpit had often been used as a hustings for political purposes, while in Strasbourg, before Geiler came, certain rival friars had been venting their spite against each other publicly from the pulpits.

Two other faults were the especial bane of the scholastic sermon. First, the tendency to make infinitesimal distinctions and subdivisions — a sort of *reductio ad absurdum* of the good scholastic dictum: “Qui bene distinguit, bene docet.” Secondly, the closely allied habit of asking and answering irrelevant questions which served no purpose except to show off the preacher’s antiquarian lore or his ability to argue in a vac-

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1) If the reader is inclined to think that similar aberrations of good taste never occurred in the Protestant church, let him read the history of orthodox Lutheran preaching in the seventeenth century. Cf. H. Hering, *Gesch. d. Predigt* (Berlin, 1905), pp. 126ff.

2) Dungersheim, chap. ii, part vii, cautions not to go into detail “Quasi medicos instruere habeant aut obstetrices.”

3) Dungersheim cautions again and again not to use jokes or any stories except those from the Bible and the fathers. Chap. ii, part vii, cautions 2, 15, 17, 18, 21, 22.

uum.<sup>1</sup> A third fault, the habit or mannerism of quoting an authority for every inch of the way, has already been dwelt upon.

Though the sermon content was not pointed doctrinally, the dogma of the Catholic church was nevertheless the foundation stone on which every preacher reared the structure of his sermons. A Protestant might find the greatest fault of pre-Reformation preaching at this very point. It is precisely in doctrine that Luther's sermons differ most radically from those before his time. For the present, however, we will not look upon its doctrine as a fault, but judge the fifteenth century sermon by its own ideals — which, as far as dogma goes, are still essentially those of the Catholic church of today.

### Conclusion

It was the fate of the fifteenth century preacher to be living in an age that was religiously decadent. He had more knowledge than his predecessors, but the strength of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was gone, and the understanding of the Reformation period was not yet at hand. His sermons were mosaics of interesting religious and cultural facts, produced by a really admirable technique; but like all mosaic pictures they were formal and did not give evidence of profound spirituality. Even where he placed his greatest emphasis, in his moral, the preacher rarely reached the depth of the Sermon on the Mount. He stopped at the outward good works prescribed by the church, many of which had no intrinsic value whatever. He thought

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1) Especially bad examples: "Whether cut-off hair and finger nails will also be resurrected?" "Why the first believers were called Christians and not Jesuans?"



of ethics in terms of merit and reward. His ethical ideal was the outgrown monastic asceticism.

Yet it should not be opined that his sermon was moribund. It was popular and effective. If it could not fashion a new age, it at least transmitted and distributed the riches of the old. It furnished the tools — and the materials — with which a master workman might forge the new.

## CHAPTER II

### THE FORMAL SIDE OF LUTHER'S EARLY PREACHING

#### Introduction

Luther was nearly thirty years old when the conversation with Staupitz recorded at the beginning of the preceding chapter took place. From that time on (about 1512)<sup>1</sup> he preached with almost uninterrupted regularity until four days before his death (February 18, 1546). The product of these thirty-four years of preaching was an enormous one, for Luther in his most active years preached not only on Sundays but on certain week days as well and two, three, or even four times on the same day.<sup>2</sup> Of all his sermons he himself preserved and published only a small number and those nearly all in the early part of his career. That we still possess most of them nevertheless, is due to the assiduity of a few excellent note-takers among his hearers and the desire among them to preserve as many as possible of the words that fell from his lips. The task they set for themselves was made easier by the fact that Luther was a *tardiloquus* or slow speaker.

All the extant remains of the Reformer's pulpit activity are garnered up in some forty different volumes of the Weimar edition of Luther's works. The total number of individual sermons is upwards of 2,300 and some of them exist in as many as four or more different

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1) It is impossible at present to decide exactly when Luther began preaching. A licentiate in theology at Erfurt was supposed not only to teach the Scriptures but to preach, and Luther received his licentiate degree in 1509. On the other hand the conversation under the pear tree seems to have taken place at the same time that Staupitz was urging Luther to prepare for the doctorate, in the fall of 1511 in Wittenberg. For the difficulties involved cf. E. Vogelsang, "Zur Datierung . . .," ZKG, 1931.

2) WA., "Tischreden," No. 1538.

versions.<sup>1</sup> The early sermons up to the beginning of 1522 number about 290. They are distributed throughout the first ten volumes — excepting V and VI — of the same edition. Some are very brief (those in volume III are mostly references inserted in the first commentary on the Psalms), some, on the other hand, are very long — the longest in the “Wartburgpostille” filling 173 large pages.

### Popularity, Places, and Occasions of His Preaching

Until 1514 Luther's sermons had been delivered to his fellow monks in the Wittenberg cloister of the Augustinians,<sup>2</sup> either in the refectory after meals or in the small dilapidated chapel that reminded Myconius of nothing more than the stable which the painters were wont to paint on their pictures of Christ's birth at Bethlehem. In that year, however, the town council of Wittenberg sent Luther a regular call to assist the sickly pastor, Simon Heinze of Brueck,<sup>3</sup> by preaching in the parish church of St. Mary's. His first preserved sermon before this congregation is dated Christmas, 1514. His preaching before the monks continued as before, though not perhaps with such regularity.

That his sermons before the people enjoyed great popularity may be gathered from the fact that copies of them, very likely written out in Latin by himself after delivery, were circulated among his friends.<sup>4</sup> After

1) The largest number for any one year is 195 for 1528, distributed over 145 preaching days. Cf. *WA*, XXVII, p. xxiv.

2) Unless the superscript on the first two sermons: “. . . quod reperiebatur in Monasterio Augustin: Erfurdiae” is taken to mean that they were preached there (cf. *WA*, IV, 588, and Vogelsang, *op. cit.*).

3) Heinze, like his predecessor, Nicolas Grueneberg, was also a part time teacher at the University. He died in 1522 and was succeeded in 1523 by Bugenhagen, who was head pastor during the entire period of the Reformation.

4) There is only one German fragment among them, *WA*, I, 52. For a discussion as to whether he wrote them after delivery, see *infra*, p. 56.

he had taken his first steps against indulgences, his fame as a preacher kept pace with his fame as a reformer. A group of admiring friends began to take notes on his sermons, and one of them (Agricola) even published his own German version of the sermons on the Lord's Prayer without Luther's permission, in 1518.<sup>2</sup>

Whatever purported to come from the mouth or pen of the famous Doctor of Wittenberg found printers ready to print and readers eager to buy. Luther himself met the demand for his printed sermons by preparing a number of them for publication. Those preached on the Ten Commandments in 1516 and 1517 were divested of their sermonic garment and published in 1518. The next year he proceeded in similar fashion with his own reconstruction of the sermons on the Lord's Prayer, held in 1517. Several sermons were also published individually and several others enlarged beyond their modest bounds into history making treatises.

Even more important than to read what the young preacher had said was to hear him say it personally. People, especially students, flocked to Wittenberg for that purpose and Luther began to appear in other pulpits. Whenever a visiting celebrity or member of the nobility was in town, a service was also held in the castle church,<sup>3</sup> where Luther would most likely preach the sermon. Frederick the Wise as early as 1512 was much impressed by one of the young monk's sermons, which was very likely given in the castle church.<sup>4</sup> When the cause for which he had entered the lists demanded

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2) For the respective volumes of the Weimar edition in which these sermons and those mentioned in the following paragraphs are published, consult the bibliography.

3) After 1525 this became a regular order. Luther, Bugenhagen, or one of the other preachers in the town would then deliver the sermon before the distinguished guest and the assembled congregation.

4) Cf. Koestlin, *M. Luther* (5th ed.; Berlin, 1905), I. 102.

his presence outside the confines of Wittenberg, Luther never failed to strike the archenemy a blow from the pulpit whenever the opportunity came. Already in 1515 at a meeting of the chapter of the German Augustinians Luther preached a sermon against detractors which was so caustic that it ruffled even the tranquillity of a Mutian.<sup>1</sup> On his trip to Augsburg in 1518 he preached a sermon at the castle in Weimar before the Elector's Court which he afterwards summarized in a letter at the urgent request of his friend Spalatin.<sup>2</sup> In 1519, during one of the first days of the Disputation he delivered a sharp sermon in the castle at Leipsic.<sup>3</sup> In 1521 he preached at least three times — at Erfurt, Gotha, and Eisenach — on the journey hither and twice — at Hersfeld and Eisenach — on the way back. The sermon at Erfurt was given in the cloister church of the Augustinians to such a crowd that when a cracking noise was heard in the galleries many people thought the church was breaking down, and some even jumped through the windows to get out. But Luther, confident as to the real cause of the trouble, succeeded in quieting his hearers by assuring them that it was only the devil up to his old tricks and that nothing would happen.<sup>4</sup> At Gotha the devil was said to have thrown stones from the gable of the church after the sermon. In 1522 on his return from the Wartburg, he made two different preaching tours through certain cities in Saxony for the purpose of clarifying the confusion that had arisen from the doctrines and doings of the Enthusiasts. On one occasion in Zwickau the multitude was so great that he left the church and spoke in the city square.<sup>5</sup> Not

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1) *WA*, I, 44.

2) *WA*, "Briefe," I, 226.

3) *WA*, II, 241. This sermon was toned down for publication.

4) *WA*, VII, 803.

5) *WA*, X, 3, pp. xclv and clxi.



all of these sermons away from home have been preserved. Of the extant ones only five seem to have been given elsewhere by Luther — one in Gotha in 1515, one at Weimar in 1518, one at Leipsic and another at Kemberg in 1519, and the Erfurt sermon in 1521.<sup>1</sup>

“Occasional” sermons are missing almost altogether among his early pulpit remains — if we except two written for an episcopal and for a monastic convention, respectively. It was not until 1525, at the death of Frederick the Wise, that he preached for the first time at a funeral<sup>2</sup> and not until 1528 that he gave a sermon for a wedding.<sup>3</sup> His first baptismal sermon came in 1540, one for the consecration of a bishop in 1542, and one for a church dedication at Torgau in 1544.<sup>4</sup>

Only once during his early activity, at Eisenach on the trip to Worms, do we hear that a violent sickness incapacitated him from preaching. This seems to be the earliest intimation of what in his later years caused him much trouble and even kept him off the pulpit

1) There is hardly a year up to 1546 in which Luther did not preach several times outside of his home town. Sometimes the sermons occurred during trips made in the interest of the Reformation, as in 1529 (to Marburg), 1530 (to Koburg), 1537 (to Schmalkalden), 1539 (to Leipsic). At other times he accepted special invitations which came from his friends among the nobility or former students, as in 1532 when he was the guest of the recently converted princes of Anhalt at the time of a great hunt, or in 1542 when these same princes invited him and his colleagues to Dessau for a vacation trip. (*WA*, XXXVI and XLIX.)

2) He gave two sermons on that occasion and again at the death of the Elector John in 1532. *WA*, XVII and XXXVI. Luther himself was in favor of funeral sermons “zu Lob und Ehre dem froehlichen Artikel unseres Glaubens, naemlich der Auferstehung der Toten.” For the accusation that Lutherans “dragged their dead to the grave like dogs” cf. *PRE*, II, “Begraebniswesen” and G. Buchwald, *Ungedruckte Predigten Joh. Bugenhagens* (Leipsic, 1910), p. xvi.

3) For Michael Stiefel (*WA*, XXVII, No. 77). One of the accounts of Luther's part in the copulation of Prince Philip of Pommern and his bride at Torgau in 1536 contains the following sentences: Andere berichten, wie der Doktor in der Kopulation einen der trau-ringe unversehens fallen lassen, sei er darueber ergrimmet und im Eifer gesprochen: Hoerest du, Teufel, es gehet dir nicht an, und die brautleute also angeredet: Crescite, et semen vestrum non deficiat. He also preached the sermon at this wedding. (*WA*, XLI, p. xxxi.)

4) These three are in *WA*, XLIX.

at two different periods, during the first of which he instituted the practice of preaching in his own home to his family and a small circle of friends.<sup>1</sup>

In only about a dozen instances among the early sermons does a special note indicate that a particular sermon was given in the monastery. And when he did preach there we know that it was not to the monks alone, for the Wittenbergers followed the custom of other townspeople of that period, who liked to attend services in the cloister churches.<sup>2</sup> We are thus safe in saying that the bulk of his early sermonic legacy is the literary deposit of Luther's preaching before the people of Wittenberg, chiefly in St. Mary's parish church, on the Sundays and festivals of the church year — beginning with Christmas 1514, and continuing until the day before his departure for Worms (April 2, 1521). Even the postils for Christmas and Advent, which were written during the first and the last half respectively of his stay at the Wartburg, represent a summing up, as it were, of what seven years of practice before a congregation had taught him.

### Times and Texts of the Sermons

In the period before 1521 Luther not infrequently preached twice on Sundays, once on the gospel in the chief service in the morning and a second time in the afternoon in the cloister church. The morning sermon, however, except on holidays, was often a double one. First there came the exposition of the gospel, sometimes in the form of an introduction to the second part, which followed immediately after and was devoted to the

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1) The first period was 1532-34, the second 1542-43. The sermons of the first period were taken down by Caspar Cruciger and enlarged into the "Hauspostille" in 1544 (*WA*. LII). Not infrequently he was attacked by a *Schwindel* either before, after, or even during the sermon.

2) *WA*, IX, 619.

treatment of such themes (usually part of a sermon series) as the Ten Commandments or the Lord's Prayer or to certain books of the Old and New Testaments, principally Genesis and Matthew.<sup>1</sup> This second half of the sermon, less formal and more of the nature of a lecture, was intended for instruction in the chief parts of the Catechism and the Bible. Sermonic lectures on this order were continued at Wittenberg throughout Luther's life, but they were later given on Sunday afternoons or on week days.

The "Formula Missae" (1523) and the "Deutsche Messe" (1526), though they show a slight change in the outward arrangements in connection with the sermon, adhere to what might be called this double purpose of inspiration and instruction. Since they evidently embodied, to some extent, practices which had been in vogue during the preceding years, we may be justified in stating their chief provisions in connection with preaching, in order to throw light on the practice of the earlier period. According to them, the practice at Wittenberg was to have three services on a Sunday: an early one at five or six, in which one might hear a sermon on the epistle; the chief one at eight or nine with a sermon on the gospel; and another in the afternoon, in which Luther usually spun farther the thought of the forenoon sermon in a lecture series on some book of the Bible.<sup>2</sup> After 1530, however, the epistle sermon was transferred from the early morning to the afternoon service.<sup>3</sup>

1) Cf. *WA*, IX, 323; also the concluding sentence of the sermon, I, 101: "But now we proceed to our purpose to finish the fourth commandment."

2) Bugenhagen followed the same plan when he preached in the afternoon and Luther in the morning. Cf. G. Buchwald, *Introduction to Ungedruckte Predigten B's* (Leipzig, 1910).

3) *WA*, XXXII, p. xxxiii. The afternoon sermon occurred at different hours, according to statements now and then attached to sermons or found elsewhere. The Catechism sermons during Lent, 1523, were delivered at 5:00 P. M. (*WA*, XI, p. li).

But there were also, according to old custom, services on every day of the week. A particular book of the Bible was designated for sermonic treatment on each day. Mondays and Tuesdays were devoted to the Catechism, Wednesdays to the book of Matthew, Thursdays and Fridays to the Apostolic Letters, while Saturday evenings — all the other services were early in the morning — were reserved for the Fourth Gospel. Just how much weekday preaching Luther engaged in can not anymore be determined. Nearly all his recorded sermons were held on Sundays and festivals.<sup>1</sup>

The index of all his sermons,<sup>2</sup> compiled according to texts by George Buchwald in volume XXII of the Weimar edition, gives evidence of certain predilections in the Reformer's choice of texts which also hold good for his early preaching career. In the first place, for every one taken from the Old Testament there are five taken from the New, a fact which is easily explained when we remember that Luther ordinarily preached on the pericopes<sup>3</sup> for Sundays and festivals.

Of the Old Testamental texts, the five books of Moses, the Psalter, and Isaiah yield the greatest number. In fact, there are only six texts from all the other books

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1) After the time that Bugenhagen became pastor of St. Mary's, in the last part of 1523, Luther naturally did not preach so often in the morning service. Whenever "Dr. Pommer" was absent on one of his reformatory tours to the North of Germany, however, Luther would step in as his *luckenbusser*. The longest leaves of absence on the part of the parish pastor were from the middle of 1528 to the middle of 1529; from October, 1530, to April, 1532; and from June, 1537, to July, 1539.

2) This index contains some 2,300 sermons. Care must be taken in counting them, for Buchwald occasionally lists as one item what is really a group of sermons, as for instance, on the five books of Moses.

3) Cf. *supra*, p. 26. Although Luther at first criticized many of the ancient pericopes or lections as being unwisely chosen, he nevertheless adhered to them. With few changes they are still the lessons read and often preached on in Lutheran churches today — as well as in all others that follow the so-called church or Christian year, which begins with the Advent season in December and continues with the Christmas, Epiphany, pre-Lenten, Lenten, Easter, Pentecostal, and Trinity seasons. Almost half of the church year is taken up by the "Sundays after Trinity" during the summer and autumn months.

of the Old Testament combined: two from Jeremiah, and one each from Judges, Ezekiel, Zechariah, and Malachi. Only four are taken from the Apocrypha and those are all from the book of Jesus ben Sirach (*Ecclesiasticus*).

There are more than three times as many texts from the gospels as there are from the epistles. The count — by the number of pages they fill in Buchwald's index — is as follows. Matthew, 9; Mark,  $1\frac{1}{2}$ ; Luke,  $10\frac{1}{2}$ ; John, 8; Acts and Epistles,  $8\frac{1}{2}$ ; sermons without texts (passion, catechism, miscellaneous), 7. Before 1521 Luther had preached on all the regular gospel lections several times, on both the Decalogue and the Lord's Prayer in two different series, on the first thirty-two chapters of Genesis, on Matthew "bis zur Stimme Johannes des Täuflers" — with the inclusion of a few parts from Mark and Luke, and on about two dozen topics without text.

### Their Number, Distribution in Manuscript and Print, and Preservation

The early sermons of Luther up to the beginning of 1522 can, from a modern point of view, be conveniently grouped under the three headings given in the bibliography: those that have been preserved in manuscript, those that appeared in contemporary printed editions, and those that were never preached as such, but were originally prepared for publication.<sup>1</sup>

The "Scholia in Librum Genesios" in the first group and the "Decem Praecepta" and "Auslegung des Vater Unsers" in the second, though based on sermons, have not come down to us in sermon form. The first-men-

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1) The reader should consult the survey of the early sermons in the bibliography in connection with what is said in the following pages.



tioned is in the nature of a commentary on Genesis 1-32 and represents what some note-taker (very likely Agricola) thought the most important exegeses and applications in Luther's sermons on those chapters from 1519 to the early part of 1521.<sup>1</sup> The young preacher himself prepared the other two writings for the press, the "Explanation of the Lord's Prayer" only, to be sure, after Agricola had condensed the sermons on which it is based into a treatise and published it without Luther's permission. Luther, however, followed the style set by his overenthusiastic admirer, his own version being in the form of a treatise also. Of the three, the sermons on the Decalogue reveal most clearly that they were originally pulpit utterances.<sup>2</sup>

The composition of the third group of those originally prepared for print, came about in this way. In 1519 the Elector sought to divert his famous Doctor from the "bitter and stormy polemical writings" that followed the Leipsic Disputation to more peaceable studies by suggesting to him that he write expositions for the Sunday and festival pericopes of the church year. Luther himself was eager to supply his fellow preachers with some homiletical aids in place of the "irrelevant fables of the sermon-mongers, 'welche Christum mehr vertreiben als treiben.'" He began the job but did not finish his first eight sermons on the gospels and epistles for the Sundays in Advent until 1521. They were written in Latin.

During his enforced stay at the Wartburg he again turned to his project and wrote (this time in German) the "Weihnachtspostille," sixteen sermons on the lec-

1) *WA*, IX, 320 f. They also appear in another version as fragments in the same volume.

2) Luther also prepared a German version of which all traces have been lost (Cf. *WA*, I, 394). The "Decem Praecepta" and the "Auslegung" were his first works to be translated into foreign languages.

tions of the Christmas season which were to be a continuation of the eight mentioned before. However, instead of translating the latter, he wrote eight new ones — the “Adventspostille” — for the Advent Sundays. Both of these groups, sometimes called the “Wartburgpostille,” were published in 1522.

In the meanwhile his Catholic opponents had used the verse, “Go show yourselves to the priests,” from the story of the ten lepers (the gospel lesson for the thirteenth Sunday after Trinity — Luke 17:11ff) to show the necessity of priestly ministration in penance. To confute this argument, Luther wrote a special sermon on the text, and had it published by his friend Spalatin in November, 1521, “seinen lieben Deutschen die Postille zu credenzen mitten aus dem Fass.”<sup>1</sup>

A count of the individual sermons shows that some 200, covering over 700 pages (four-fifths of which are Latin) in the Weimar edition, belong to the manuscript class, while some fifty with 275 pages (three-fifths Latin) to those which were printed soon after they were preached.<sup>2</sup> This shows that only a fourth of the extant ones were originally printed and that Latin was still the natural language for preserving sermons, though these had nearly all been preached in German. The sermons of the postils number only thirty-three, but they fill 1080 pages, from which we may gather that Luther was much more verbose in print than in the pulpit.. Altogether there are nearly 290 extant sermons,

1) The postil for the whole year, or “Kirchenpostille,” was not completed until 1527. Luther himself added another part, the “Fastenpostille” in 1525, while his friend Stephen Roth compiled the “Sommer-” and “Festpostille” from his notes during the following two years.

The postils had an incalculable influence on Protestant preaching. For one thing, they crowded out the *Plenarien* of which no edition appeared after 1521.

2) The “*Decem Præcepta*” were counted as thirty-two, the “Explanation of the Lord’s Prayer” as six, sermons. The “*Scholia*” were not included because the fragments to which they correspond have already been counted.

but of these, sixty (mostly of the manuscript class) have come down in second versions besides the ones counted. The total number preserved, to hazard a guess, represents about one-half of those actually given from 1512-21. Most of the extant sermons of the period before 1517 come directly from Luther's own hand. This is the very opposite of what happened later, when the busy preacher rarely made an effort to preserve what he had preached—probably because he knew that everything he said was being taken down better than he could have done it himself.

The chief names among the early penmen of the great preacher were those of Agricola (John Schneider—later court preacher in Brandenburg), Stephen Roth (later city clerk of Zwickau), Poliander (John Grauman—later preacher in Prussia), and Melanchthon. These men and others also, took notes directly from the speaker or copied from the notes of others to form versions for themselves. In some instances, as in Melanchthon's, they seem to have been prompted by pure admiration. But most of them wanted copies for use in their own work of preaching or publishing later on.<sup>1</sup> None of them were so faithful and assiduous as the later George Roerer, deacon of St Mary's and chief editor after Luther's death of the first complete edition of his works, who for twenty-four years, Sunday upon Sunday, took notes in abbreviated Latin of the messages of his honored master in theology.<sup>2</sup>

Another fascinating story is that of the printers. An examination of the bibliography of the sermons up to

1) Stephen Roth compiled the "Sommerpostille" (1526) and the "Festpostille" (1527) from his notes. He does say, however, that he collected the sermons and fragments from the years 1514-20 *pro memoria* (WA, IV, 589).

2) These notes were rediscovered in the library of the University of Jena in 1893 by G. Buchwald. WA, XXIX, pp. xvi ff. contains a description of his method of taking notes.

1522 in the Weimar edition shows that over thirty printers in twelve different cities were publishing volumes containing sermons that had been preached by Luther. Most of the printers of Germany sided with the new doctrine from the very beginning. That their conversion may not have been altogether a matter of the spirit is indicated by the fact that nearly two thousand editions of Luther's writings were published between the years 1517-25<sup>1</sup> and that the richest men in Wittenberg during the Reformation period were the printers and booksellers.<sup>2</sup> The only rewards the Reformer received for supplying them with manuscripts was a free copy of the printed book whenever he wished to present one to a friend and the satisfaction of seeing his teachings disseminated through the length and breadth of the land with unexampled celerity.

The lucrative character of the printer's trade at that time led to lively competition and sharp practices, from many of which Luther also suffered. Some of his early sermons were printed without his permission by his friends<sup>3</sup> and some by the printers themselves, though a little after our period.<sup>4</sup> There was of course no such thing as a copyright, but this fact rather hastened the circulation of new books. As soon as one of them appeared, it was pirated by printers in different cities, who worked their presses day and night to get their

1) *PRE*, Vol. XXIII, article, "Buchdrucke . . ."

2) The names of the early Wittenberg printers who published sermons are John Grueneberg, the first printer in Wittenberg, Melchior Lotther, Jr., who came from Leipsic in 1519, and the firm of Cranach-Doering. Hans Luftt, the "Bibeldrucker," achieved his fame later, as also did George Rhau, the music printer of the Reformation.

3) Cf. the already mentioned "Auslegung d. Vater Unsers," *WA*, II, 74 and IX, 122 (Agricola's version) and the "Sermon v. d. Ehelichen Stand," *WA*, II, 162, and others.

4) For instance, in Strasbourg and in Basel in 1523. Cf. Koestlin, *op. cit.*, I, 576. In 1525, when the "Fastenpostille" was in the press, a typesetter stole the greater part of his manuscript, which was then published in an edition full of errors in Nuremberg, to Luther's great indignation.

own editions to the bookstalls ahead of the others. After 1527 there are fewer printed and more manuscript copies of the sermons, very likely because the complete "Kirchenpostille," which was first printed in that year, began to supplant all other printed collections. As time went on, the Wittenberg printers acquired a kind of monopoly, partly through Luther's efforts in their behalf with neighboring princes, and partly through a carefully planned and guarded method of distribution.

### Luther's Preparation and Delivery

Luther's preparation for his sermons was a matter of hours or of years depending on what one understands by that term. He of all men spoke from the fullness of his heart. Long years of intense religious struggle and intensive university training had made him the possessor of a vast store of inner experience and knowledge, so that by the time he took over the parish pulpit of St. Mary's he had arrived at the stage where a short period of concentration and a few jottings on a piece of paper were all he needed to hold forth for an hour before the congregation.

It is hard to say just exactly how much preparation in the restricted sense he put on his sermons in the early period. Did he write out the earliest manuscripts, all of which come from his hand, before delivery? Judging from the practice of most young preachers, one would say that he did. Certainly it would seem strange that he should sit down afterward to write out what he had said — unless he had early ambitions to appear in print or unless he had been requested by someone to do so. Now the last possibility is very likely. Many of the early manuscripts were preserved by his friend and admirer, John Lang of Erfurt. It can well be that



he set himself to the task of writing out his sermons at the request of Lang and of other friends. But even in this case, would he not do it before delivery? One might judge that probable, were it not for the fact that medieval preachers when they wanted to save the sermons that they had preached in the vernacular were wont to translate them into Latin afterward.<sup>1</sup> Besides, a remark in one of the sermons transmitted by Loescher shows that Luther had readers in mind, at least when he was writing this particular one. He says: "Pardon, reader, the expression of so great a thing with such inadequate words."<sup>2</sup> Finally, we know that in his later career he worked out only a *Konzept* but never the complete sermon beforehand. We may therefore conclude that what we have of Luther's earliest preaching represents the sermons written in his study on Monday mornings, not the ones preached in the pulpit on Sundays.

There now follow certain facts concerning his preparation and delivery, which have been gleaned from what he said and did in later life. Yet we believe that they can be legitimately cited to illustrate the principles and practices of his early years also, since there is no evidence that the latter changed to any extent.

A few of his *Konzepte* have come down to us. They are in Latin for the most part<sup>3</sup> and are not what one would call well arranged outlines, but rather meditations or summaries. In two of them there is a mere listing of catch-words. More often there is a notation of the chief thoughts, one or the other of which may be developed at considerable length. "In my sermons," he often said, "I try to take one theme or statement and

1) This matter is discussed in detail in G. Owst, *Preaching in Med. England* (Cambridge, 1926), pp. 223 f.

2) *WA*, I, 28.

3) *WA*, XLVIII, 334 gives the list of twenty-two extant ones. Of these only three are German and they may not be the originals.

stick to it and show the people so plainly that they can say: This was the sermon."<sup>1</sup> Although he advised his students to divide, define, and demonstrate well, he did not work out the details of his own outline — otherwise his sermons would be too long, he said, for the gift of brevity and perspicuity was not his in the same measure as it was Melancthon's and Amdorf's.<sup>2</sup> But there was another factor in the making of a good sermon besides the preacher's efforts over the outline, and that was the assistance of God through prayer.<sup>3</sup> The real *Konzept* comes from God. "Unser Hergoth wil alein prediger sein." And Luther goes on to tell how his own *Koncepte* often vanished into thin air when he came upon the pulpit and how he involuntarily became the mouth-piece of a message he had not originally planned to utter. A comparison of the extant sermon meditations with the delivered sermons for which they furnished the preparation shows that most of the time Luther on the pulpit departed from the lines of thought he had set for himself in his study. Yet fluent as he was and much as he believed in the inspiration of the Spirit, he needed at least a brief time to prepare each sermon he gave. Often he was vexed in his sleep by dreaming that he had to preach and had no *Koncept*.

Much of what needs to be said about Luther's appearance on the pulpit has already been stated in the paragraphs dealing with the formalities in connection with the medieval preacher. Being a monk, he naturally preached his early sermons in his monastic cap and gown. It was not until October 9, 1524, that he dis-

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1) *WA*, "Tischreden," No. 1650.

2) *Ibid.*, Nos. 2113; 2869 b; 3173 b.

3) *Ibid.*, No. 2606 a

4) *Ibid.*, No. 3494.

carded the cowl and appeared in *veste communi* for the first time.<sup>1</sup> His later pulpit costume was a modification of the scholar's gown of the time. It reached to a short distance below the knees, as may be seen in several of his full-length pictures.

Luther did not recite his text from memory, at least in the later period, not because he was afraid that he would get stuck, as Staupitz once did in reciting the list of names in the genealogy of Christ in Matthew 1, but because Christ set the example by preaching from a book.<sup>2</sup> The vanity displayed in the first method may have repelled him also. Staupitz had ejaculated: "Thus is pride punished," when his memory had failed him.

Luther spoke slowly and distinctly,<sup>3</sup> yet one can not read his sermons without feeling that his voice and his whole person must have been charged with fire when he was delivering them. The sparks still seem to fly even to a reader four hundred years afterward when of a sudden some strong German expression flares up in the midst of the quasi asbestos lining of the Latin. Thus in the sermon against detractors (1515) in the midst of none too tranquil Latin this sentence occurs: "Sunt enim vergiftete Schlangen, Verraetter, Verloffer, Moerder, Diebe, Stroeter, Tyrannen, Teuffel, und alles Unglueck, verzweiffelt, unglaeubig, Neidhardt und Hasser."<sup>4</sup> That he often worked himself and his hearers up to a high pitch of excitement during the tense times of those early years can not be doubted. At least once his words had such an incendiary effect on certain persons among the audience that the whole service was dis-

1) *WA*, XV, 404.

2) Luke 4. Cf. *WA*, "Tischreden," No. 4052. For the Staupitz story cf. J. Mathesius, *Luthers Leben in Predigten*, No. 12. There is some reason to believe that members of the Wittenberg audiences had New Testaments at hand during the sermon (cf. Werdermann, *Luthers Wittenberger Gemeinde* (Guetersloh, 1929), p. 270).

3) *WA*, "Tischreden," Nos. 4657 and 5199.

4) *WA*, IV, 675.

rupted and he had to stop preaching because of a turmoil.<sup>1</sup>

For studied rhetorical effects either in diction or gesture he had an absolute aversion,<sup>2</sup> which explained why, in spite of their racy and suggestive language, his sermons contain exceptionally few so-called purple passages. He did use gestures, however, and there is reason to think that the folds of his monastic garment were not as motionless as those of Pericles' gown were said to have been when that great orator spoke.<sup>3</sup> His bearing is described as manly and erect.

One of his most famous bits of advice for preachers, "Steig flugs auf, tu's Maul auf, hoer bald auf,"<sup>4</sup> to quote it in its popularly crystallized form, reveals his feelings about long-windedness. He insisted on keeping within the limits of the customary hour for the sermon.<sup>5</sup> If the preacher had nothing to say he ought to preach only a half or a quarter of an hour rather than to talk without saying anything. Once Luther left the church during one of the interminable sermons of Bugenhagen, who had the habit of testing the patience of his hearers not only by preaching to them for two hours or even more but by trying to silence their complaints with a verse from John 8: "Who is of God heareth God's word."<sup>6</sup> Luther was, however, aware that he himself was not always as concise in sermonizing as he might have been.<sup>7</sup>

At the close of his pulpit ministrations Luther was wont to pray. "Auf ein gut predigt ghoert ein gut

1) *WA*, IX, 582. Cf. also J. Mathesius' account and excuse of his brusqueness on the pulpit, *op. cit.*, No. 12.

2) *WA*, "Tischreden," Nos. 5047, 5099, and 4619.

3) *WA*, XLIX, p. xxxvii.

4) *WA*, "Tischreden," No. 5171 a and b.

5) He himself followed his own advice, *WA*, XXVI, 103.

6) *M. L. Ausgewählte Werke*, VII, pp. liv f. (Buchwald's Introduction).

7) *WA*, "Tischreden," Nos. 965 ; 3173 b.

gepet, das das wort krafft hab," he once said.<sup>1</sup> Whether he meant by this a spoken or silent prayer is not clear. Very likely there were both, as there still are after most Lutheran sermons. In the morning service on Sundays in Wittenberg the sermon always came after the *Patrem*, or Confession of Faith, and was followed by the liturgy in preparation for the Sacrament.<sup>2</sup> That would mean that when Luther was descending from the pulpit the celebrant and his assistants would advance to the altar and the choir would rise to intone the first responses of the communion service.

### The Homiletical Character of the Sermons

For the formal homiletical structure of his sermon Luther developed a style which is neither medieval nor modern, though it has more affinity with the former. John Gerhard characterized it well when he spoke of its "heroic disorder." There are a few textual pericope sermons like the one on the Sower and the Seed,<sup>3</sup> in which the different kinds of earth give the natural divisions of the sermon, also an occasional textual verse sermon like the one on II Timothy 3:1-9, in which the twenty epithets of the text furnish as many subdivisions for the writer.<sup>4</sup> But most of the sermons approximate the type of the ancient homily in which one verse after the other is commented upon. Those in the "Wartburgpostille" of 1522 are usually arranged on this model.

There are a good many of the relics of decadent scholasticism in the earliest sermons. They may have appended to them from one to four *corrollariums* whose

1) *WA*, XXVIII, 73.

2) Cf., Koestlin, *op. cit.*, I, 780 ff; also the "Deutsche Messe," *WA*, XIX.

3) *WA*, I, 134.

4) *WA*, X, 1, I, 634 ff. This is really a separate sermon embedded in the long one on the gospel for the Epiphany in the "Weihnachtspostille."



purpose seems to be equivalent to spacing or paragraphing.<sup>1</sup> One of the two oldest sermons is divided according to the scheme: *Quis, quid dat, cur, quo motivo, quid facit, ad quid*, and both are full of questions and minute divisions.<sup>2</sup> Sometimes the word *doctrina* introduces a new part, or the heading *mysteria, spiritualiter*, or *heimliche Deutung* indicates that Luther, having laid the solid foundation of the literal meaning, is now about to emulate his medieval forerunners and rear his own airy castle into the clouds. The first sermons of the "Weihnachtspostille" have a last part entitled "Harnisch of this Gospel" or "Epistle," in which the salient thoughts of the text are recapitulated and pointed for the better defense of Reformatory doctrine.

A favorite mechanical device, which Luther inherited from the schoolmen and utilized also in other writings up to his last years, is to begin each new paragraph or thought with a *zum ersten, zum zweiten*, and so on. The sermons on the Ten Commandments (1518)<sup>3</sup> are full of such numberings. Like that homiletical virtuoso of Puritanism who is supposed to have announced, "and now to be brief, I will say eighteenthly,"<sup>4</sup> our preacher has to his credit one sermon which ran from "for the first" to "for the twelfth," and another with eleven parts, though it is only fair to say that each part is comparatively brief.<sup>5</sup> Two other sermons, originally composed for print, have fifteen and twenty parts apiece. A comparison of the printed and manuscript version of the first sermon makes it very likely that, in speaking, Luther did not proceed so far in his count

1) *WA*, IV, 659 ff.

2) *WA*, IV, 590 ff.

3) *WA*, I, 394 ff.

4) J. Neale, *Med. Preachers* (London, 1856), p. lxvii.

5) *WA*, VII, 795 (cf. IX, 547).

6) *WA*, II, 131. The second is the sermon on II Timothy 3:1 ff., mentioned above.

as he did in writing. The manuscript version, instead of numbering from one to eleven, begins to count from one three different times.

Luther's style of preaching may be described as a combination of the expository and the topical methods. Rarely is there a really exhaustive textual exposition even in his homilies. The individual texts or verses or even words of Scripture, whether they came from Genesis or Revelation, were to him merely so many signposts pointing the way to what he considered the great central fact of Christianity: justification by faith. And there are few of his sermons which do not in one way or another treat that topic.<sup>1</sup> But even when he speaks of other things, one often feels that the text has suggested rather than supplied the topic and the argument.

The hiatus between text and application was common in the pre-Reformation sermon also. Because of the lack of scientific exegesis and the uncontrolled habit of allegorization, one rarely has the impression that what is said is a real development of the thought given in the text. There is always a far-fetched, naive quality about the exposition. The most egregious example in this respect is the second sermon for Christmas in the *Discipuli Sermones*, in which John Herolt made a double leap, as it were, first from the text to the occasion (Christmas) and then from the occasion to what sometimes and among some people took place on the occasion — namely, gambling and dicing. Here he found what he considered a good foothold and proceeded to deliver an emblematic sermon on the fancied

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1) "Welcher die Bibel lesen will, der muss eben darauff schauen, dass er nicht irre, denn die Geschrift laesst sich wol dehnen und leiten, aber keiner leite sie nach seinem Affect, sondern er fuehre sie zu dem Brunnen, das ist, zu dem Creutz Christi, so wird ers gewisslich treffen und nicht fehlen. Unam praedica, sapientiam crucis" (*WA*, I, 52).

likenesses between winning at dice and losing at salvation.<sup>1</sup>

As far as Luther is concerned, the long sermon for the Epiphany in the "Weihnachtspostille" (on Matthew 2) may serve as an illustration of how peripheral the text often is in his treatment.<sup>2</sup> The sermon, to be sure, was originally written and never intended to be preached in its present form. It is really a group of sermons. But in the treatment of the text it is similar to the oral ones and can therefore be looked on as an epitome of Luther's general practice at a time when it was approaching maturity. Here the word *magi* offers an occasion to dwell for several pages on the hidden powers of nature. The *star* points the way to a discussion of astrology and natural science. The latter ought not to be especially studied but limited to what experience and common knowledge brings. The *search of the scribes in the Scripture* to find the answer for Herod's question is legitimately applied to show that our knowledge of Christ must come through the Bible and not through the teachings of men. This affords a chance for a characteristic outpouring on how the pope and his cohorts have displaced the Bible by three things: "Menschenlehre, heyligenexempel, and vetterglossen." So bad have things become that natural light and hea-

1) He also laid down rules for the game, as, that it was to be played only by laymen, for pastime, and not during fasting or Lenten days. Restitution of winnings was always to be made. Luther also treated gambling in one of his sermons (cf. *infra*, p. 124) and condemned it outright, though he did not think restitution was to be demanded any more than that a harlot was to be required to relinquish her ill-gotten gain.

Dicing and card-playing seem to have been especially common during the Christmas holidays. St. John's College at Cambridge forbade both except at that season but excluded undergraduates even from the Christmas privilege.

The reader may recall Latimer's two famous "Sermons on the Card," preached during Christmas, 1529. Latimer does not disapprove of cards, but uses certain features of the game *primero* to illustrate the commands of Christ about our relations to our neighbor.

2) *WA*, X, 1, I, 555-728.

then art are now placed above theology and people have become devil's pupils.

The last thought leads Luther one step farther astray: "But you ask, ought one not to believe that there are ghosts who err about seeking for help." The answer is, not to worry about them. "If you hear a *pollter- und rumpelgeist* in the house, cross yourself, believe the more strongly, and let him be." Much more similar advice is doled out. The discrepancy between Matthew's quotation in *verse* 6 and the original in Micha is then touched upon.

In the "spiritual" interpretation which follows, the fundamental image of Herod as the symbol of the pope, in opposition to Christ, is maintained to the end. The sermon on II Timothy 3, already mentioned twice, comes next. Each item of the "perilous times that shall come in the last days" is applied to the papal system with numerous concrete illustrations from the life of the times, including a polemical passage against the mendicant preachers.

Herod's deceitful promise to come and *worship* Christ introduces a fine passage on what real worship should be — namely, life in faith. This in its turn introduces a long discussion on the value and validity of monastic vows. Finally, the *warning in a dream* not to return to Herod is used to inculcate once more the lesson that we must avoid the teachings of men.

"You will see from my 'geschwetz'" says Luther in conclusion, "how immeasurably greater God's word is than man's word." This fact must indeed be conceded. Throughout all the preacher's peregrinations the cloud that he followed even when the text was light, the pillar of fire that he saw before him when it seemed to be dark, was nothing else than God and the Word.

One modern writer has said that the art of making transitions is the secret of writing well. Luther possessed this subtle art but he made little use of it between the paragraphs and divisions of his sermons. It came to him naturally in the flow of his language and in the surge of his feelings when he was in the midst of his favorite topics. But when he had momentarily exhausted one phase of the message he was too impatient to get to the second and too disdainful of anything artificial to waste much time in concealing the transition. Thus, in addition to the enumerations just mentioned, one constantly finds expressions like the following: "That is the first part of the gospel; the next treats of the Sabbath" or "We have said a little about the sacrament; now we will speak of the Resurrection."<sup>1</sup>

The introductions and conclusions are even more abrupt and matter-of-fact. Rarely is there the slightest sign of an exordium or a peroration. One of the sermons begins as follows: "We must now treat the Passion of our Lord because it is the time of the church year to do so. Therefore I will tell you first . . ."<sup>2</sup> Another thus: "Today we want to say a little more about the birth of Christ."<sup>3</sup> Samples of abrupt endings are these: "What the spittle means, we will save for another occasion." "But of this I have a sermon in print. Therefore I will omit it now. Read it there."<sup>4</sup> "Davon het einer sein lebtag genug zcu predigen."<sup>5</sup>

This sudden breaking off at the end is explainable in part by the fact that, like the pre-Reformation

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1) *WA*, IX, 663 and 658.

2) *WA*, IX, 469.

3) *WA*, IX, 531.

4) *WA*, I, 273 and 324. The sermon preached at Erfurt on the way to Worms has a somewhat more formal conclusion (*WA*, VII, 813).

5) *WA*, IX, 661.



preachers, Luther regarded the announcements which followed the sermon in the chief morning service<sup>1</sup> as almost an integral part of the sermon itself. Most of the copyists considered them too ephemeral in nature to take down. But a few fortunately did not want to lose even these words of Luther. Their notes show that often the most interesting things said in the pulpit, at least from the cultural and social points of view, occurred in those special announcements and exhortations after the sermon. In them the preacher descended to the level of the daily practical problems of the people and urged or cautioned, commended or criticized, as the case might be.<sup>2</sup>

Luther spoke against the common medieval practice of quoting Scripture and other authorities in Latin or even in Greek or Hebrew before translating them for the people. He knew that many of his friends and followers indulged in the practice.<sup>3</sup> In fact it became more common among the learned dogmatical preachers of the Lutheran church after Luther. He did, however, occasionally quote a moot term in Greek or Hebrew<sup>4</sup> and once in a while threshed empty straw before the people about some abstruse grammatical question, as, whether Hebrew transitive verbs were used neutrally or absolutely.<sup>5</sup> The tendency to find fantastic etymologies for proper names has not yet altogether been sloughed off in the early sermons. He derives Herod's name from *heros*, which means "kerlisch, rissisch, grossstetig,

1) *WA*, XXIX, p. xxvii.

2) Especially for the period between 1528-32, Anton Lauterbach's notes on the announcements are also extant. They have been used by Buchwald in his reconstructions of 194 sermons of Luther during that period. Werdemann has used them for his book *Luthers Wittenberger Gemeinde*. Special admonitions to the students concerning their public demeanor in the town were also brought after the sermon (*WA*, XLVI, p. xix).

3) *WA*, "Tischreden," No. 5006.

4) *WA*, I, 78; 104.

5) *WA*, I, 132.

eyn Ditterich von Bern odder Hildebrantt odder Roland odder wie man sonst die grossen morder, und leutfresser nennen will,"<sup>1</sup> and sometimes treats Mary's name etymologically.<sup>2</sup> He had virtually abandoned the old habit of copious quotations from the fathers, though here and there one will still find a sermon in which it survives, as in the one for Epiphany, 1517, which contains an array of patristic explanations of the "gold, frankincense and myrrh."<sup>3</sup>

There is nothing besides the pure doctrine that Luther stresses more in theory or practice than to preach so that the least among the hearers can understand what one wants to say. In one of his outspoken comparisons, he advises the preacher to feed milk to the people in the same way that a mother suckles her child. He himself addresses his words not to "Dr. Pommer, Jonam, or Philippum" but to his little "Henslein and Elslein."<sup>4</sup> As a result his sermons are unusually full of illustration and their language is popular, racy, and colorful. Occasionally his efforts to visualize an abstract doctrine, like the Incarnation or the union of the divine and human in Christ, demonstrate at one and the same time his versatility in finding concrete illustrations and his inability to make the difficult abstractions more intelligible through them.<sup>5</sup>

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1) *WA*, IX, 620.

2) *WA*, I, 106. The biblical derivations of the names of Jacob's sons are presented in a sermon of 1520 (*WA*, IX, 535).

3) *WA*, I, 122. Cf. *infra*, p. 137.

4) *WA*, "Tischreden," No. 3421.

5) *WA*, X, 1, I, 58 ff. in the gospel sermon for Christmas day, and 145 ff. in the epistle sermon for the same day (both in the "Weihnachtspostille").

### CHAPTER III

## THE THEOLOGICAL CONTENT OF THE SERMONS

### The Earliest Sermons (1512-16) and the Heritage of Scholasticism

The lucky discovery of Luther material by Buchwald in the last decade of the preceding century brought to light two sermons in the *Ratschulbibliothek* of Zwickau which may rightly be regarded as the earliest examples of Luther's preaching. Kawerau, in editing them for the Weimar edition, inclined to list them among the parish sermons.<sup>1</sup> But their titles say that they were copied from a manuscript found in the Erfurt monastery of the Augustinians in Luther's handwriting. This and the character of both form and content led Vogelsang to suggest that they may have been given in the Erfurt cloister as early as 1510 or at the latest in that of Wittenberg in 1512.<sup>2</sup> The last suggestion sounds most plausible, though the number of practical illustrations in the first sermon would seem to indicate that there were laymen in the audience as well as monks.

The first sermon, strongly ethical in content, furnishes good proof for the statement that Luther rebuilt the foundations of the morality of his time. The casuistry of scholasticism had taught concerning the golden rule that it was enough not to hate the neighbor and to do an act of love occasionally. Our preacher overrode that with sharp insistence.<sup>3</sup> It is not enough not to do evil to the neighbor. He who has the chance to

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1) *WA*, IV, 590 ff.

2) *ZKG*, 1931, 112 ff.

3) Cf. *WA*, I, 468 ff. where Luther treats the question again in connection with the fifth commandment.

feed the hungry or clothe the naked or teach the erring and does it not is a murderer, a thief, a seducer. The doctrine that we must also fulfill the commandment positively both in the external and spiritual spheres is proved by reason (!), Scripture, and analogies (from Scripture and the animal world). Luther illustrates his doctrine by citing examples of conduct from the life of the times. Toward the end the reader for the first time meets the statement of a cardinal principle in Luther's system of ethics: "bona quaecunque sunt a Deo et non data ad retinendum vel abutendum, sed ad dispensandum."

The second sermon is an interesting example of looking forward and backward at almost the same time. Here the scholastic method of excessive subdividing, of raising and answering questions that have no practical value, is still more in evidence than in the preceding sermon. The philosophers are even said to have agreed with God *ex instinctu spiritus sancti*. Angels are more perfect, but men are more wonderful. They have free will and must collaborate with God in their salvation. Christ became man to judge the quick and the dead. These unlutheran emphases are in juxtaposition to others directly opposite in character, which occur especially at the beginning of the sermon. The majesty of God, the all-sufficiency of his grace, and the sin of man are clearly enunciated. The motive for good works should arise from a feeling of thanks for the gifts of God, but—it prompts us to do something for our salvation also.

The following words constitute an embryonic definition of the later *theologia crucis*<sup>1</sup> and seem to betray the original relationship between that famous doctrine

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1) Cf. *infra*, p. 81.

and the monkish mortification of the flesh: "Alius usus rerum est afflictivus, quando malo sustinemus . . . Sicut sunt passionēs, paupertates, ieiunia (!)."

Talented men in the sixteenth century often composed speeches that other preachers or professors were to deliver. Tradition has it that Calvin in 1533 wrote one for Nicolas Cop, the rector of the University of Paris, which, after being delivered, forced the future Reformer to flee from the city. A similar case is the third oldest of the extant sermons of Luther, written by him for his friend, George Mascov, the provost of the Leitzkau monastery, who wished to give it at an episcopal synod very likely held in Ziesar, June 22, 1512.<sup>1</sup> The sermon is most lucid in outline and treatment and, except for a typically monkish comparison between the physical birth of passion and seed and the spiritual birth of the Word, which would not be considered in good taste today, is worthy of the honor of being among the first-fruits of the great preacher. The text is I John 5:4f, and the following questions are treated: What is 'being born of God'? What is the 'world'? What is the 'victory' of him who overcometh? With vehement words he accuses the priest of preaching false doctrines, superstitions, and man-made fables. "Would to God that I could with burning and glowing words thunder this into them that the priest must be rich in the Word of Wisdom." There are too many ceremonies. The meticulous observance of such things as washing the hands for mass and clothing oneself in resplendent garments are considered more important, especially among the higher clergy, than to eschew the lusts of the flesh. And then, in the last part, the trumpet tones of the Reformation begin to sound. Through

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1) *WA*, I, 8 ff.



faith, given by God, we have Christ, and through Christ victory over the temptations of the flesh. One of his few perorations, beginning with Augustine's word: "Faith obtains what the law demands" ("Fides impetrat quae lex imperat"), brings this sermon to an impassioned close.

The next oldest among the sermons we have and the only complete one among those embedded in the Lectures on the Psalms, 1513-14,<sup>1</sup> is an interesting *tour de force* of allegory, in which Luther outplayed the medieval preachers at their own game. Perhaps these phrases give a wrong impression. The preacher, after all, used his allegories not as playthings — even divine playthings — but in all seriousness as instruments to discover divine truths.

It was preached for the festival of the martyrs and the text is Psalm 60:8: "Moab is my washpot" — but Luther took *olla* to mean "cookingpot." This pot is the world, which persecutes the saints. Its three legs are the lust of the flesh, of the eyes, and the pride of life — I John 2:16. In order that we may become a dish fit for Christ — "Bring me venison and make me savory meat," Genesis 27:7 — preachers hunt us like beasts in the woods of sin, kill us with javelins of the Word of God and distribute our members — dead to sin, so that we may serve the Lord in justice. Like the quarry we are killed, quartered, and skinned, and then placed into the kettle. Christ constantly stirs up the fire, in order to make us boil (suffer tribulations) and steam (send up prayers to God). The process is most signally exemplified in the lives of the martyrs. On the other hand, the godless feel nothing of this uncomfortable heat. But if we experience it, we may

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1) *WA*, III, 342 ff.

take it as a sign of being called. God is preparing the crown for us. Among the questions raised is this one: Why does Moab represent the pot? Naturally, because of Moab's incestuous origin. But the true representatives of Moab are the Jews, for they too are born out of an abuse of the law.

Four other sermons, first printed by Valentin Loescher in 1720 from a now lost manuscript, may claim the honor of being among the earliest samples of Luther's preaching.<sup>1</sup> The first one was preached on Christmas day, 1514, in the chapel of the Augustinians on John 1:1. The preacher evidently took for granted that he had a learned audience before him, for he speaks about the Trinity and the Incarnation in a manner as abstract and scholastic as his later dicta on these deep doctrines are popular and concrete.<sup>2</sup> The sermon may stand as the most notable example of his use of dialectics and of metaphysics — not to say quibbling — for the purpose of visualizing the activity of the Trinity within itself and toward man. Thus God the Father is the *mobile*, the Son, the *motus*, and the Holy Ghost, the *quiens*, and the eternal process of being moved and coming back to rest explains the creation of the world, God's work in man, and the changes in nature — for nature, according to a favorite idea of Luther's, is a reflection of the Triune God. The Word became flesh that the flesh might become Word. "Deus fit homo, ut homo fiat deus." Luther credits Aristotle with inventing the metaphysical formulae which make these explanations possible, yet some of them seem to borrow from the Neo-Platonic idea of emanation as well. Of course, our substance is not changed in a

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1) *WA*, I, 18 ff.

2) Cf. *supra*, p. 57, note 5 for references.

pantheistic manner; rather we partake of the divine when we accept the Word and adhere to it through faith. The Aristotelian interpretation of phenomena as *forms* (or ideas) which through *movement* unite with *matter* is used to describe how the understanding of virtue must be united with its practical exercise in love. Thus one can see the utility of this "beautiful philosophy understood by so few." Yet Luther suspects that Aristotle stole it from somewhere.

The second sermon on Matthew 23; 24,<sup>1</sup> preached on St. Stephen's day (December 26) in the cloister chapel, still employs the scholastic method. In an ingenious but hardly legitimate distinction<sup>2</sup> he maintains that divine knowledge comes to us in three ways: through the heart, immediately from God, as it did to the prophets; through the ear, by the teachings of others, as it does to wise men; and through the eyes, by reading Scripture, as it does to scribes (students of the Bible). The self-righteous reject these three classes of men, but those who realize their own lack accept them and their teachings.

The most interesting feature of the sermon is its argument in favor of the scholastic doctrine of the *synteresis*, the ineradicable divine spark of conscience within sinful man. It is what the physician calls the natural powers, without which no disease could be healed, and shows itself in the universal desire not to be damned, but saved. Luther finds Scripture verses to prove it, too. Isaiah, in his forty-second chapter, said: "The bruised reed he shall not break," and in his first: "Except the Lord had left unto us a small remnant." Job

1) *WA*, I, 30.

2) Luther's divisions are not infrequently on this order. Cf. his grouping of the Ten Commandments in the sermons on the Decalogue (the first speaks of the thought, the second of the word, the third of the deed) and the sermon for the Day of Matthew, 1516 (*WA*, I, 85).

14:7 also assures us that "there is hope that the tree cut down will sprout again."

Yet our perversity threatens to spoil this residual tendency to good, which in any case is not sufficient for salvation. We must therefore not reject Christ's gifts nor his methods of giving them. By doing the latter we will become guilty of His crucifixion. The close of the sermon brings a favorite comparison of Luther's between the sinner and the sick man.<sup>1</sup> God is the physician and good works are the medicine. But they, like medicine, are not an end, only the means to an end.

The next sermon on Ecclesiasticus, 15:1-8, is the first of which we definitely know that it was given in the parish church — the date is December 27, 1514.<sup>2</sup> Its theme is "The Fear of God." The phrase has for Luther certain overtones of personal experience which one does not catch at a first reading. He speaks with great feeling about that fear of God which is the greatest of blasphemies, namely, to hate Him and to wish that He did not exist. The idea, rather alien to the modern mind, becomes clearer when we recall that Luther's religious struggle was so intense for the very reason that it seemed to be pushing him to this conclusion and that Staupitz saved him from such a blasphemy only by convincing him that afflictions were not the sign of a hating but of a loving God.

The use of the term "Fear of God" in Luther's famous explanation of the first commandment in his catechism has in recent years led to a controversy concerning its exact meaning.<sup>3</sup> The definition in this sermon supplies the winning side with one more bit of evidence. The

1) Cf. *Luther's Vorlesung ueber d. Roemer brief*, J. Ficker ed. (Leipzig, 1908), II, 108 ff.

2) *WA*, I, 37.

3) Cf. J. Meyer, *Das erste Gebot bei Luther*, Luther, Heft 1, 1929.

word fear is not to be understood in its usual acceptance when Luther employs it in the phrase mentioned. It is not *horror dei*, the breeding ground of hate, nor servile fear, nor fear of punishment. On the contrary, it is *reverentia dei* and arises out of love. He who has it truly, blesses God not only in earthly afflictions but even in death and hell. He accepts and approves God's actions as just and good and true. Every work is good in the measure that it has fear of God; and that applies to prayers, fasts, and vigils, as it does to the callings of a tailor, a shoemaker, a lawyer, a prince. One doesn't have to be choosy about works, therefore.

Luther employs a long list of synonyms and similes to set forth what Ficker in another connection has called his second great discovery,<sup>1</sup> namely, that throughout life we are at one and the same time saints and sinners. "With the left foot we are in sin — in the old man, with the right in grace — in the new man." There is also a faint aroma of mysticism about the sermon — the highest of the three degrees of the fear of God "pure propter Deum timet Deum."

If the next sermon<sup>2</sup> was given at a chapter meeting of the Augustinians in Gotha, May 1, 1515, as there is good reason to believe, the fact is not especially complimentary to the monks assembled there. The sermon is aimed "Against the Evil of Detraction," which must have been all too common among them. The content is anything but abstract or impersonal; rather, it is pointed horizontally and must have made many of the monks squirm in their seats while it was being given.<sup>3</sup> It ruffled

1) *Op. cit.*, p. lxxiii.

2) *WA*, I, 44 ff; the text is Ps. 112:5.

3) Of course, it is well to remember that there had been strictures on the lives of monks, priests, and prelates long before Luther. Owst shows that the sermons given at synods and provincial meetings in England were characterized "by the freedom and violence of their denunciations



the *beata tranquillitas* of the famous Humanist Mutian.

Every detractor is a murderer, figuratively speaking. But the figure is worse than the fact in this case, for the detractor commits a threefold murder, killing, first, the good name of the slandered one; second, his soul, for he will be aroused to hate the detractor; and third, the one who listens to the slander willingly.<sup>1</sup> The abusive German sentence already quoted<sup>2</sup> is a sample of the denunciatory epithets the preacher offered his hearers on this occasion. But perhaps the coarsest thing Luther ever uttered in the pulpit occurs in an exuberantly scatological passage of some length in which the detractor is compared to one who wallows in another's filth.<sup>3</sup> It can undoubtedly be accounted for by the taste of the time. At least, the monks seem not to have been offended. On the contrary, they were evidently so impressed by the preacher's moral seriousness that they elected him as their District Vicar at this meeting.

The two Easter sermons of 1516,<sup>4</sup> the first of that year, are aberrations of homiletical practice, the one being an attempted harmony of the gospel stories of the Resurrection — which is necessary, Luther says, for the evangelists write confusedly on the subject. The divergences among them bother him at other times. It was one thing which made preaching on the gospels very different from epistle preaching, he said.<sup>5</sup> What

and exposures" (*Preaching in Medieval England*, pp. 248 ff.). Cf. also John Colet's famous sermon before Convocation in 1512. Soon after Luther had preached before the chapter meeting he made his first visitation of the cloisters of his district and found nothing worth mentioning by way of criticism. He may therefore to some extent have been following the genre of sermons which criticized clerics.

1) Cf. *WA*, I, 473 for a repetition of the same thought.

2) Cf. *supra*, p. 58.

3) A similar passage occurs among the sermons on the sixth commandment. *WA*, I, 492. Luther once said: Die Deutschen sind in ihrer Sprache zierliche Leute, wenn sie von dem reden was durch den natuerlichen Gang ausgeworfen wird (Walch, VII, 388 — Notes on Matt. 15, 16 f.).

4) *WA*, I, 53 ff. A third sermon of this year is a mere fragment from which a quotation has already been made, cf. *supra*, p. 62.

5) *WA*, VII, 458; X, I, I, 8.

follows is a correct but dry ordering of all the facts of the Resurrection. The second sermon is given over to fantastic allegorization on Judges 14:14: "Out of the eater came forth meat and out of the strong came forth sweetness." Luther evidently offered his congregation poorer fare on this particular festival than he did on many ordinary Sundays, something which occasionally happens to modern preachers — and congregations — during a busy festival period.

Thus far we have considered the earliest products of Luther's preaching. It would be difficult to find a single adequate term to characterize them all, yet they all have certain features in common. For instance, they unmistakably betray their author. Only Luther could have poured out these intense, outspoken, colorful effusions.

Another striking characteristic is their tone of high ethical seriousness. The preacher is full of impatience with things as they are. The practice and theory of morality is confined too much to the surface of life to suit him. When he criticizes the clergy, especially the prelates and the monks, his criterion is not the monastic ideal but Christian virtue. As regards doctrine, the young preacher, to use his own figure, is standing with his left foot on old, with his right on new, territory, undecided which way to go.

But perhaps the most distinctive feature of all these sermons is the impress of scholasticism — in form and treatment, and often also in material. This is not surprising when we consider that the young preacher had been trained in all the wisdom of the schoolmen and that he was even now practicing his art as a university professor. We may therefore look upon the earliest

sermons chiefly as examples of the scholastic heritage in Luther, the preacher.

Sermons of 1516-17  
and the Heritage of Mysticism

About the middle of the year 1516 Luther began the practice of giving a *gemina concio* or twin sermon in the morning service, the first half of which was the exposition of the regular gospel lection, the second the sermon series on the Decalogue and, during Lent 1517, on the Lord's Prayer. The gospel sermons given in connection with the treatment of the Ten Commandments were printed by Valentin Loescher in the eighteenth century and are known as "Exordienpredigten," as though they had been only introductions to what followed. Some of them appear in very brief form, to be sure, yet their content shows that they were really complete in themselves. Besides, in one case, for the day of St. Lawrence,<sup>1</sup> there exist two versions, one a short fragment, the other a full-size sermon, which seems to clinch the point. Except for two brief references, we shall for the present leave out of account the sermonic treatise on the Decalogue, which belongs in a class by itself, and consider only these so-called "Exordienpredigten," which ran up to the last of February, 1517, and the Explanations to the Lord's Prayer, which followed weekly thereafter during the Passion season.

All the emphases of the earliest group of sermons occur again, at least in the "Exordien." But there are new ones also and if one thing stands out more than any other it seems to be the spirit of mysticism. Luther had imbibed a good deal of that through the counsels of Staupitz and through earlier reading, especially of

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1) *WA*, I, 74.

Bernard and Gerson. But it was not until in 1516 that he discovered a spirit kindred to his own in the German mystics, John Tauler and the anonymous writer of a book that Luther published twice, once in part (1516) and once completely (1518), under the name of *Ein Deutsch Theologia*. Concerning those who do good works only for their own profit, he advises his people, "See all of Tauler's sermons, for he knew these hypocrites well."<sup>1</sup> His letters and the introduction to the *Deutsch Theologia* re-echo with similar words of praise. The mystic influence was noticeable in a good deal of Luther's theological thought in these years, but he never came so near to identifying himself with its principle as in some of these sermons on the gospels and on the Lord's Prayer in 1517.

Before we consider the latter, it might be well to sum up briefly the salient teachings of this gentle but deep-lying current of religious feeling which had come down from the fourteenth century and permeated the best piety of the time, and also to point out in how far it fertilized Luther's own thinking. According to mysticism, the true goal and happiness of human life was reached when the soul had perfect communion, not to say union, with God. To achieve such a desirable and exalted end required not only long patient effort but the use of a sort of technique which led from one degree of abstraction to another (*Entwerden*). One began by turning away from the sensual world, from the mechanics of ecclesiastical practice, even from one's own self, and contemplating God in Christ. The process, especially in its early stages, was accompanied by great pain, for it meant nothing less than dying to the world

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1) *WA*, I, 137.

and to one's own existence in the world, and suffering both purgatory and hell (*resignatio ad infernum*). Though man had in his depths a *Seelengrund* or divine residuum, he had no virtue that could stand before God nor any power to aid in his own salvation, except a negative one, that of *Gelassenheit* or non-resistance to Divine activity when it began in the *Seelengrund*. Indeed, it was very necessary to cultivate perfect passivity, going away from oneself, so that God would not be hindered in accomplishing and crowning his own work in man. In the highest stages the mystic devotee forgot about himself and all creatures. He needed neither the words nor the works of institutionalized religion. He was in direct communication with God, and his reward was the "delicious" (Staupitz uses this term) bliss of seeing and enjoying God, even as Christ did himself.

If this program had actually been carried to the limit, it would have ended in quietism and pantheism. Fortunately, only a few people, and even they only occasionally, could approach the ultimate in the abstraction of self and the submersion in the divine. Fortunately also, most of the mystics — especially Tauler — were imbued with Christian love, which kept their speculations from soaring beyond the reaches of practical Christian piety.

When we compare Luther's fully developed ideas with those just epitomized, we are struck both by the resemblances and the differences. With the mystics he rejected the merit of human virtue before God, but whereas they looked upon human incapability as a lack, Luther's religious experience had convinced him that it was a guilt, incurred by sin, which vitiated the whole being. This view excluded for him the idea



of an untainted *Seelengrund*.<sup>1</sup> He too magnified the part of God and belittled the works of men in bringing about salvation. But for him the purpose of salvation was not primarily mystical union with God or ecstatic bliss. It was ethical living — in the Spirit but for the neighbor. Human suffering of every kind had a very necessary function in Luther's system — his "Theology of the Cross" went far beyond what the mystics taught. It was not the more or less artificial result of certain mystical soul exercises through which one anticipated the purifying pangs of purgatory, but an affliction from God, who thereby forced men to despair of themselves and thus laid the foundation for His saving work of grace. Human suffering was not a technique of men, but a technique of God.

The similarities and dissimilarities come out strikingly when one reads Tauler's sermons alongside those of Luther. The latter's Christmas sermon of 1520, for instance, dwells upon certain ideals which Tauler had treated in his first sermon for Christmas day: the passivity of Mary in the birth of Christ, the necessity of His being born spiritually in us, and of our being freed from the interests of the world. Tauler spends a good part of his time in speculating on how the soul is psychologically or mystically united with Christ. Luther dismisses this particular problem by saying: "I speak of love and desire by which one accepts the Christ-child. More I can not say. It must be experienced to be understood." Tauler's sermon aims to draw the soul

1) In commenting upon a passage in Luther's sermon on Zachaeus, 1516 (*WA*, I, 95; IV, 671), in *ZST*, 1928, p. 128, the eminent Luther scholar, E. Hirsch, inclines to think that Luther retained the belief in the mystic *Seelengrund* as also in the scholastic *synteresis*: "... dass durch Hilfe des heiligen Geistes der Mensch das Herz zu Gott bringt in Glaube und Liebe, aber damit nichts anders tut als den im Herzensgrunde wohnenden, unmaechtigen, heimlichen Willen zu Gott zu entbinden und erloesen."

away from its human self and from the world. "Our Lord said: I came to bring the sword to cut off what belongs to man, his mother, brother, sister. Where you feel at home, there is your enemy." Luther in his sermon would rather sever the soul from its supposed merits and glorify the work of God and the "new life" resulting from it.<sup>1</sup>

Thus Luther's debt to mysticism can easily be over-rated. But in 1516-17 he felt his own views to be so powerfully corroborated by what Tauler and the writer of the *German Theology* had written that he unconsciously appropriated some of their ideas and phrases. The precipitate of mysticism is traceable from June, 1516. It becomes more prominent until it reaches a climax on the day of Epiphany, 1517. It can be found here and there in all the sermons after 1517, including the postils. In March, 1521, he assures his hearers that everyone must at some time or other in life experience the purifying terror of God's wrath over sin — "fuleth ers nicht im leben szo muss ers zcw letzt im tod und fegfewer fulen."<sup>2</sup> He does not, as a matter of fact, ever really reject the mystic piety or teaching which he had hailed with such enthusiasm in the early years. Whenever he contended for an inner as against an institutionalized religion, he would be likely to draw some of his weapons from the arsenal which these devout friends of God had bequeathed to him and to all lovers of true religion.<sup>3</sup>

But his sad experiences with the Enthusiasts in 1522 and afterward made him suspicious of any form

1) Cf. *WA*, VII, 188 ff; IX, 526 f. Tauler's sermon is No. 8 in Hamberger's edition (Prague, 1872).

2) *WA*, IX, 653. Cf. also the epistle sermon for Christmas Day in the postil.

3) This fact is brought out in E. Seeberg's study of Luther's commentary on Genesis (*Studies z. Luthers Genesisvorlesung*, Guetersloh, 1932).

of teaching which might seem to sanction a direct mystical communion with the divine. Experience also taught him, as his early theological training had already done, that the institution was after all necessary in Christian life. His later dicta about the mystical side of religion do not, therefore, appear so extreme as the expressions he used in some of his sermons of 1516-17, to which we now return.

In his first sermon on the First Commandment, June 29, 1516, Luther includes among the idolators those who do not remain passionless (unmoved and quiet) amid the vicissitudes of this earthly existence, who enjoy life or fear death. The yearning for our Lord Jesus Christ ought to make us love and desire poverty, ignominy, sufferings, and death and to be surfeited with riches, glory, and pleasures.<sup>1</sup> When he began with the third commandment, some time in August, he harked back to the same subject. We must try to achieve the *pura quies*, lest we offend God by works. The first three commandments seek to make us "purified matter," worthy of God in our sensual, rational, and spiritual natures. We are to be *deiformis* to such a degree that like God we become indifferent to every day, place, and person.<sup>2</sup>

About a month later, in treating the story of the Centurion, he distinguishes three stages of faith, the beginning, the progressing, and the perfect. In the first two we need words and works as reminders and exhorters, but in the highest stage the union of believer with the one believed in is so perfect that the slightest motion of the will of the latter prompts the believer to action.<sup>3</sup> The following Sunday our preacher

1) *WA*, I, 400.

2) *WA*, I, 436.

3) *WA*, I, 87 ff.

again comes to the three stages but by a roundabout way. The tribulations of life are to be prepared for in days of fair weather. The chief wisdom we are to learn about them is that they are tokens of God's mercy. And since the Lord's Prayer concerns itself with them — it is "full of cross" — he will speak about it and show his people how to pray. He then explains the address and the first two petitions — the rest of the original manuscript has been lost. The petitions are applied to the three stages of belief. For instance, a man in the first one will pray "Thy kingdom come" and ask especially that he be led out of Egypt, that is, lust. A man who is progressing in faith asks to be turned from inward temptation, while he of the perfect faith thinks only of the future eternal kingdom.<sup>1</sup>

The sermon for St. Andrew's day<sup>2</sup> is more outspoken still.

It is impossible at the same time to have faith and the things of the world (as represented by the ship and the nets which Andrew left). As long as the heart has a single thing in the presence of which it is happy and in whose absence it is unhappy, it has not faith . . . for one must trust only in the unseen, after leaving all things . . . Righteousness out of faith is so wonderful because it leaves all things. And at the end of the sermon — showing that even Luther sometimes squeezed the last possible drop out of a serviceable figure — he once more introduces the

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1) *WA*, I, 89 ff.

2) *WA*, I, 101 ff. (November 30, 1516).

three stages of faith.<sup>1</sup> The man of perfect faith does good works only when he thinks neither of merit nor reward nor punishment. He must at all times bear in mind his nullity. Then he rests outside himself in God (*extra se positus in deo*). It is a dizzy height, and perhaps that man is luckier who stays in the lower class and looks only upon Christ.

On New Year's day, 1517, Luther laments the fact that so much of the preaching of the time concerns itself with outward works. Yet he asserts that faith is not inactive but living and is granted for the sole purpose of fulfilling works — *ad et propter opera*.<sup>2</sup> But in the sermon for the Epiphany six days afterward, he seems to commit himself once and for all to the program of mysticism.

"This," he says, "is the pure and select myrrh, to resign oneself to pure nothingness as we were before we existed, and to long neither for God nor anything outside of God, but only let ourselves, according to the good pleasure of God, be led back to His principle, that is, to the nothing. For as we were nothing and longed for nothing before we were created, except to be in the knowledge of God, so we must go back again and in the same manner know nothing, be nothing. This is the way of the cross through which we come to life."<sup>3</sup>

Luther seems to have receded from this extreme position almost as soon as he had occupied it. Before he left the pulpit on this particular day he had dis-

1) A chronological reading of the sermons reveals the interesting fact that when Luther had found a worthwhile idea he would reintroduce it into his sermons for three or four Sundays in a run — unconsciously perhaps. Thus in the latter half of December, 1516, he kept repeating the teaching of the difference between the law and the gospel (*WA*, I, 107 ff). In March, 1521, there are several variations in several sermons of the thought that one must not command a Christian, for no command affects him (*WA*, IX, 640-657).

2) *WA*, I, 119 ff.

3) *WA*, I, 123, (38 ff.).



tinguished between doctrines propounded by the preacher and those propounded by God. The preacher brings the sound to the ear, but God lets it penetrate to the heart. Therefore, we ought not to rely upon men or upon ourselves but on God's leadership *manifested through men*. After all, the communication of God is bound to the outward Word! In the sermon "On leaving all things" — Matthew 19:29<sup>1</sup> — two weeks later, the mystic coloring shades strongly into the ethical. The desire for the things of the world is the root of all evil as the disregard of them is the root of all good. Therefore, who does not want to be abandoned, let him abandon; who wants to be loved, let him hate; who would be honored, let him scorn.

The mystic note then subsides for a while only to be heard again during Lent in those fine appreciations of the Lord's Prayer in which Luther on Sunday mornings set forth before his people thoughts appropriate for the consecrated season.<sup>2</sup> True prayer, he begins by saying, is inner desire, sighing and yearning from the depths of the heart. All the fathers say that it is the elevation of the heart to God. Oral prayer, like trumpets, drums, organs, or any other noise, is merely a mechanical stimulus to urge the heart to its duty. Sometimes the one who prays with his lips knows as little about the thought as the lead pipes of the organ do about the music they make. But after the heart has once begun, words stand in the way — though the beginner is warned not to neglect the words until the soul has learned to fly.<sup>3</sup>

1) *WA*, I, 126 ff.

2) *WA*, II, 74 ff.

3) *WA*, II, 97, 81 ff. The second paragraph of the sermon on Zachaeus, 1516, adds some interesting thoughts on prayer. "Right prayer is heard by no one, not even by the person praying, except by God. . . . But He hears our fundamental desire, which goes beyond all thought" (*WA*, I, 95; Walch, XIX, 932).

According to Cyprian the seven petitions are seven signs of human suffering and imperfection through which a man may see what a lamentable thing life is. The devil's kingdom is still in all of us; therefore it is best to pray: "Thy kingdom come; dear father, let us not live long here below that Thy kingdom may become perfect in us and we be freed of the devil's kingdom."

The purpose of the third petition is to make our will perfectly subject and conformable to that of God — to such an extent that we become passive (*gelassen*) and free and know nothing except to follow God's will. The best will is thus to have none at all, for then alone can one find God's.

This preoccupation with the mystical kingdom within us leads Luther to interpret the fourth petition in a way that is exactly opposite to what its words say in their literal meaning. Daily bread is not common bread which heathen also eat and God gives to all people without asking. It is the heavenly, spiritual bread, Jesus Christ. Here lies the real hunger and thirst of the soul. Christ would tell us that we must be more concerned about the hunger of the soul than that of the body. Did he not even forbid us to care about external needs?

There is much more in these thoughts on the Lord's Prayer than the mystic strain just touched upon. In fact, we have here the first draft of what a dozen years later became the classical explanations in the Small Catechism. But a look backward will be of some interest also. For instance, a comparison of these sermons with a sermon on the Lord's Prayer by the fifteenth century preacher, John Herolt, will show how much Luther was indebted for some of his finest things

to the age which preceded him. Let us first draw the main lines of Luther's interpretation.

After setting forth what true prayer really is, in the manner already indicated, our preacher calls attention to the fact that we call God not Lord or Judge, but Father. Thereby we remind ourselves of our fortunate relationship to Him. The words "who art in heaven" serve chiefly to bring home to us the realization of our low estate. Our human life is an exile (*Elend*) which we can transcend only through Christ. In addressing God as *our* father we proclaim that we are all brothers and that we must pray for one another.

The first three petitions have one thing in common. They try to impress on us the fact of our imperfection. God's will is not yet hallowed, His kingdom not yet come, His will not yet done in man. But he who, after striving faithfully, admits his shortcomings, who judges and criticizes himself, will be forgiven by God for that which he has not done. The name of God is dishonored when we yield to the evils of fleshly lust or presumption, as it is hallowed when we allow God to continue the work He began in us at baptism. His work will become manifest in Christian virtues, the importance of which the preacher impresses upon his hearers at length. This petition fittingly comes first, because the name of God is equivalent to the honor of God, than which nothing is nearer and dearer to Him.

In connection with the next petition Luther specifically rejects the hedonism which with many people is the chief motive for prayer and for piety. We are not to think of the kingdom of God as "freudt und lust ym hymel" — but as "frum, tzuchtig, reyn, milt, sanfft, gutig, und aller tugent und gnaden voll sein, also das

goth das sein in uns habe und er allein in uns sey, lebe und regire."<sup>1</sup> Happiness and joy will then follow of themselves, as the effects follow a good wine.

We have already spoken of the interpretation of the third petition as submergence of our will in that of God and of the fourth as the spiritual bread of Christ. The next gives him occasion to speak about the difference between the indulgence of God, given freely and sealed by the wounds of Christ, and the ones hawked about the country. He would not condemn the latter, only not have copper honored more than gold. If indulgences actually could delete all guilt we might erase this prayer, but if the prayer be true, then God help the indulgences. For not all of them, together with the sacrament of penance, can free us of the necessity of praying "Forgive us our trespasses." This prayer may be understood in a twofold way, of the inner forgiveness, which we need at all times and which is given directly by God through faith, and of the outward forgiveness, which corresponds to the outward administration of the sacrament of penance. The first is for advanced believers, the second for beginners — lest they despair. The greater part of the sermon, however, deals with the necessity of forgiving the neighbor.

The following petition brings Luther to one of his favorite themes: "Why temptation?" — or as he calls it, *Anfechtung*. The answer is the one which Staupitz had taught him long ago: God permits afflictions (assaults of temptation) that we may learn to despair of ourselves and to trust in Him. Therefore we do not pray for freedom from them but for strength to bear them or withstand them, according as they are such

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1) *WA*, II, 98.

(like sickness) which make men morose and hateful or such as tempt us to commit the sins of the flesh.

The prayer for deliverance from evil comes last because it is the last thing we ought to be concerned about. We ought to desire its fulfillment only if it is consonant with God's honor. And since this earthly life is nothing but a series of evils we ought to pray for deliverance from it altogether in this petition. The word "Amen," finally, signifies that faith is the chief part of the prayer — for the prayer becomes effective not by the measure of our devotion but by the word and promise of God and our whole-hearted trust in it.

Now let us review the thoughts of the older sermon of John Herolt,<sup>1</sup> which surprisingly will be found more closely related to the explanations of Luther's Catechism in many instances than Luther's own interpretation of 1517.

We say "Our Father," says John Herolt rather than "Our Creator" because God loves us and would have us love Him as a Father. Since we are all his heirs, we should remember not to look down upon any of our fellowmen, be they poor, or feeble, or old, or of low birth. No one but brothers can say "Our Father." "Who art in heaven" suggests not the place (for God is everywhere) but the nature of God and the eternal destiny of man. "Hallowed be Thy name." Since God's name is already holy in itself, the petition can mean only that we desire it to be sanctified in our hearts by faith and love and preaching and good works. After the honor of God we should desire most that His kingdom, especially His heavenly kingdom, should come to us and in us, for "the kingdom of God is within us."

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1) *Sermones Discipuli*, "de tempore," No. 65.



The chief object of the next petition is to bring the mind of all men, of the godless and also of complaining Christians, into harmony with the will of God. A hollow vase resounds when struck and an ungreased wagon wheel makes a noise. Thus only the man who knows not God's will murmurs when God sends affliction to test him. "Our daily bread" signifies all the necessities of life. These all are the gifts of God. Further, He adds also the superfluities of life out of His own free will. We show our thanks to such a bountiful donor by trusting in His help and not worrying or praying for the morrow. "Debts," in the fifth petition, is the widest of terms that mean transgression. It includes our sins against God, man, and ourselves, and not only the guilt but also the punishment. In connection with the sixth, the Christian prays not so much to escape all temptations, for he must be tempted if he is to learn how to achieve victory, but to be saved from those which overpower him or catch him unawares like a fish in a net. Finally, we pray for deliverance from all the evils of this life, and that is fitting and necessary, for we are surrounded by them. Above us there is inordinate fear, below us love for the world, before us a perverse will, behind us love for soul-destroying sins, at our left impatience in adversity, at our right overbearance in prosperity.

#### The New Theology in the Early Sermons, 1516-22

No reader of Luther's early sermons — or of any of his sermons for that matter — would hesitate long with an answer if he were asked this question: Is there in them any one outstanding idea which one might call the burden of his message? Luther illustrates the

truth of the saying that to have discovered one great new idea is enough of an achievement for any single man in his lifetime. His new discovery — or rediscovery — was the doctrine of justification by faith, that central act of salvation, according to St. Paul, in which the Lord of Mercy out of the clay of human existence creates a new Adam who is worthy to dwell in the Paradise of the Spirit. This great fact the preacher proclaimed with the still small voice and with words of thunder, in season and out of season, in almost endless sameness and endless variety. His opponents accused him of stressing it at the expense of the ethical side of Christianity and of mistranslating the Bible in its favor. It may be admitted that in the early period, at least, Luther sometimes read his doctrine into individual Scriptural verses or passages which were quite innocent of it.<sup>1</sup> It may also be contended that not even his followers were clear as to the exact meaning of justification by faith, for scarcely was Luther in his grave when quarrels arose among them over the question as to the exact limits of justification.<sup>2</sup>

Yet who will deny that the doctrine was a soul-filling, life-giving experience for Luther and for count-

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1) Cf. *infra*, pp. 133 ff.

2) A controversy had broken out already in the late 1530's with Agricola about the measure in which faith and good works were to be preached. Further, the differences of opinion concerning justification were transferred to America a few hundred years later, where they still are one of the reasons why certain Lutheran groups are separated.

There is a difference of opinion concerning what justification meant to Luther even among scholars. In the *NKZ* of 1923 Prof. W. Walther criticized the views of Luther's *Rechtfertigungslehre* as presented by K. Holl (*Gesammelte Aufsätze* [Tuebingen, 1923], I, 91) and by R. Seeberg (*Dogmen-Geschichte* [3rd ed., Leipzig, 1919], IV, 238). Holl answered and was in turn answered by Walther in the *NKZ*, 1923, pp. 165 and 668, respectively. The present writer believes that Holl's attempt to prove that, according to Luther, God justifies because he intends to sanctify, is hardly successful, though the attempt to ethicize the doctrine has its appeal.

In 1933 F. Kattenbusch summed up the whole subject admirably in "Die vier Formen der Rechtfertigungslehre" (*ZST*, pp. 28 ff., 203 ff.). Luther's he calls the reconciliatory form, in which "Christ on the cross brings God's love to victory in the sinner by awakening in him the understanding of its nature."

less of his followers and that it exerted a revolutionary influence in the history of religion and culture. By substituting the personal faith of the believer for the mediation of the priest it robbed the traditional ecclesiastical institution of its underpinning. Both the Protestant Church and Western Civilization are deeply indebted to the Reformer's discovery and his ceaseless preaching that man is justified not by the works of the law but by faith.

How did Luther chance upon this great discovery? It came at the end of a long struggle which can not be understood without taking some account of the theology in which he had been trained. The theological world-view of declining medievalism harbored in its bosom two elements which were strikingly opposed to each other. There was first the traditional belief in the merit of good works before God, which expressed itself in manifold and extravagant forms, such as, works of penance, pilgrimages, endowments, the monastic life, and the like. At the opposite pole was the idea, held especially by the Occamist School and symbolized by the pomp and power of the church, that God was absolute majesty and arbitrary will, unbound in the last analysis by any laws that men knew and saving whom he chose not on the basis of merit but solely by a predestining act of grace or "acceptance." It was understood that this "acceptance" would be granted to him who had done his best (*quod in se est*)<sup>1</sup> — but who could be sure that he had done his best? Thus there appeared an almost feverish activity in the direction of salvation but never any ultimate certainty regarding it.

1) Luther presents this view several times in his first sermons. Cf. *WA*, IV, 259, "*Hinc recte dicunt doctores, quod homini facienti quod in se est deus infallibiliter dat gratiam.*" After 1517 he spoke differently: "*Si homo facit, quod in se est, semper peccat*" (*WA*, IV, 651).

This tension was instinctively capitalized by the church, whose coffers were being filled, in the same proportion that good people were seeking to do their best to insure their salvation.

Here then was Luther's trouble. He had been educated in the Occamist tradition. He was going as far as the farthest along the road of good works and yet each new turn in the road seemed to show that he was hopelessly lost and farther than ever from his goal. He began to despair not that there was a God at all, but that God was there *for him*. He was tempted to hate the Deity, which in Luther's mind was equivalent to the most terrible blasphemy. From these qualms Staupitz delivered him by pointing to the wounds of Christ as the best commentary on predestination. God's mercy never shines clearer than in the Passion of Christ or in the affliction of Christians. The kindly monitor bade him turn away from his own imperfect works to the perfect work of the Savior and to look upon the love of God's justice as the end, not the beginning or necessary condition, of repentance.

Under the influence of Staupitz and the study of the Scriptures (especially the Psalms) and of Augustine, Bernard, and Gerson, Luther's concept of God underwent a profound change, which became complete with his discovery in the latter half of 1514<sup>1</sup> that Romans 1:17 speaks not of the condemning but of the saving righteousness of God — that which God gives. He still believed in predestination. This comes out clearly in his lectures on the Psalms in 1515 and ten years

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1) This date, suggested by Vogelsang in *Die Anfänge v. Luthers Christologie* (Berlin, 1929), has been widely accepted by scholars as the most probable one. Cf. J. Reu, *Luther's German Bible* (Columbus, Ohio, 1934), pp. 106 ff., 338 f.

later in his *de servo arbitrio*, but somehow that fact did not bother him as it once had done. The strong man could look the matter in the face and be ready to suffer even his own damnation for the glory of God. The weaker man ought to remember only the comforting side of the picture that God loved whom He chastened, and that he who was tortured by doubts about his salvation was already saved.<sup>1</sup> Since it is God's gift, we may be absolutely sure that we have salvation, and wrong is their doctrine who bid us doubt whether we are truly contrite and whether we truly have grace and forgiveness.<sup>2</sup>

Luther was especially bitter against the idea of merit through works, and if they were works instituted by men, the matter became only the more heinous. His contact with the writings of the German mystics fortified him in this connection, and all that was needed for him to launch the waves of his hatred against the "do-religion" was some public occasion, such as the traffic in indulgences provided. We may now turn to the sermons to illuminate this very brief summary with his own words on the subject.

Here and there in his writings Luther has given more or less veiled accounts of the severity of his early religious struggle.<sup>3</sup> His early sermons contain some of them also. In the sermon for Good Friday, 1521, he speaks of a man who is in such great anxiety and tribulation that he believes himself guilty of the death of Christ and an enemy of God. At such a time "it seems to him that one moment is a hundred years and that it is impossible to live through the terror." Nor is he

1) *Lectures on Romans*, ed. by Ficker, II, 215, 217 f.

2) *WA*, IX, 415.

3) One of the most famous occurs in the *Resolutiones disputationum de indulgentiarum virtute* of 1518. It is translated in Reu, *op. cit.*, p. 104.



thinking, as some of his modern critics have suggested, of torments that have their origin in sex. "Dan was ander sunth sein, als eebruch und dergleichen, die fallen all abe und werden fur die geringsten geacht."<sup>1</sup> In such a predicament he advises the tortured one to forget his own conscience, look only upon Christ's sufferings, and remember that they were borne to save each one of us. In the sermon on the fourth petition, 1517, he speaks in a similar tone. When the sinner feels that he is "forsaken and abandoned to devils and to evil people, and that God cares for him no more, then is the real hunger and thirst of the soul"<sup>2</sup> — or what he elsewhere calls "die rechten Knoten."

Out of this experience of despair and terror Luther evolved what later, in the *Lectures on Hebrews* and in the "Heidelberg Disputations" (1518),<sup>3</sup> he called the *theologia crucis* or *ab imo*. It may be called peculiarly his own, though it has parallels in mystical teaching and is not without antecedents in the theory of monasticism. The idea is expressed frequently in the sermons from the very beginning.<sup>4</sup> One of the first detailed expositions of it comes in the sermon on the day of St. Thomas, toward the end of 1516, where the Scriptural bases for the belief are also presented.<sup>5</sup> Isaiah 28:21 predicts that "the Lord shall rise up . . . to do his work, his strange work." In Deuteronomy

1) *WA*, IX, 654 f. The only passage the writer ran across which might give the psychoanalyst some slight ground to stand upon for such a theory occurs in the sermon on the sixth petition (*WA*, II, 125) where Luther speaks with feeling about some who have done their utmost to counteract unchastity by fasting and working. They broke their bodies but without result.

2) *WA*, II, 106.

3) The first edited by E. Hirsch and H. Rueckert (Berlin, 1929), the second in *WA*, I.

4) Cf. *supra*, p. 70, also the *Lectures on Romans*, ed. by J. Ficker, II, 219. Probably the best sermonic treatment of the idea is given in the exposition of the text, Matt. 15, 21-28 (on the woman of Canaan), in the "Fastenpostille" of 1525 (*WA*, XVIII, 2; Walch, XI, 544).

5) *WA*, I, 112.

32:39 God assures men that he "will kill and make alive . . . wound and heal." Finally, Christ, according to Romans 4:25, "was delivered for our offenses and raised again for our justification." Therefore Luther felt himself justified in universalizing his own experience and positing a twofold work of God, an *opus proprium* and an *opus alienum*. The first is nothing less than the gospel of grace and salvation, the second, however, is contrary to the nature of God, though it leads to the same result. It is a roundabout way to the real work and consists in making men "sinners, unjust, liars, afflicted, ignorant, and damned" — convincing them of sin, in other words, that they may not hinder God's work of grace. It is, to use a modern picture, the blow by which the rescuer knocks the drowning man senseless, in order to affect his rescue. Christ himself experienced the *opus alienum* in his Passion<sup>1</sup> and the *opus proprium* in his Resurrection, which correspond in us to the crucifixion of the mortal man and the birth of the new man.

Elsewhere Luther speaks in much the same sense about the *deus absconditus* and the *deus revelatus*.<sup>2</sup> The Christian understands by revelation through Scripture and experience the seemingly unaccountable fact that God chasteneth whom he loveth, that He allows the devil to plague man in order to free man from the devil. So sure is Luther that this is the way of life and salvation that he believes all men must experience it — either in life or in purgatory<sup>3</sup> — if they would be saved. He even designates the whole content of the Bible or of the Lord's Prayer as nothing more than a teaching of

1) In harmony with this view is Luther's interpretation of the "descent into hell," not as a sign of triumph but as the last full measure of suffering.

2) *Lectures on Romans*, ed. by Ficker, II, 219; *WA*, X, 139.

3) *WA*, IX, 654 (1521).

cross and an admonition to bear the cross.<sup>1</sup> One of his objections to indulgences is that they upset God's law by trying to lessen trouble, suffering, and tribulation. The truly penitent sinner seeks punishment, but the indulgence preachers hold out freedom therefrom as an inducement.<sup>2</sup> Yet the belief that one can thus find joy beneath the cross or peace in the midst of turmoil flatly contradicts human reason; wherefore it is to be looked upon as a work of God known to no man except to him who has experienced it.<sup>3</sup>

The theology "from below" — of salvation through humiliation — seems to merge at times with Luther's Pauline theory of the law and the gospel. The underlying principle in his sermons in the Decalogue is that the law, by demanding perfect spiritual fulfillment, drives the sinner to despair of himself and to resort to God. In later sermons, when the concepts of the law and the gospel become more and more clearly differentiated and integrated, the part each plays in salvation corresponds very nearly to the "real" and the "alien" work of God. A sermon of February 2, 1521, dealing with the Old and New Testaments, or the two things which should always be preached, puts the matter thus: Through the Old Testament we become fit to come to Christ. We realize our frailty, are humbled, and yearn for help. The New brings us this help and makes us holy.<sup>4</sup> A classic passage on the law and the gospel, in the gospel sermon for the third Sunday in Advent, distinguishes them thus: The law eventually shows man that he is a "child of death, anger, and hell. That leads to trembling and desperation; all presumptuous-

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1) *WA*, VII, 483.

2) *WA*, I, 130; 99.

3) *WA*, X, 1, II, 187.

4) *WA*, IX, 578.

ness disappears, deepest fear and despair enter in, and man is bruised, annihilated, and made quite humble." The ground thus being prepared, God comes with His gospel, a lovely living word of grace which casts out despair and sin and gives strength for a new life.<sup>1</sup> But these two works of God are simultaneous rather than consecutive. Every Christian throughout life is sinner and saint at the same time. Likewise every word of God has the double character of frightening and comforting, bruising and healing, humbling and exalting, and both law and gospel are to be preached,<sup>2</sup> as also each Christian is to accept, at one and the same time, the condemning and the condoning God.

Exactly one year before Luther began his historic attack on indulgences he discussed them for the first time in the Wittenberg parish pulpit.<sup>3</sup> The people are being misled, he maintains, by seducers and fable-mongers who make broad statements (*buccinant*) that are true in a sense and yet not true because understood falsely. He affirms that the purpose of the pope in granting indulgences — at least as it is laid down in the certificates and syllabi — is a correct one. Modern Catholic writers like to point out this fact to show that the abuse in indulgences was purely a matter of practice, not of theory. But Luther dislikes the slant of indulgence preaching toward making private confession and satisfaction the chief part of penance. The Bible nowhere mentions either. On the contrary, it enjoins general confession, for James exhorts Christians to confess their faults one to another. True confession is an affair of the heart, and if they say that only a few

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1) *WA*, X, 1, II, 155 f.

2) *WA*, II, 95, 108.

3) *WA*, I, 94, in the last part of the "Sermon before the Day of Dedication," 1516.

chosen people can achieve true confession, why then, asks Luther, do harlots and publicans begin with this perfect variety?

On St. Matthew's day, February 24, 1517, the topic is again broached, briefly but intensely.<sup>1</sup> Indulgences are in such demand because they make sinning easier and annihilate Christ and his cross. "Oh, how great are the dangers of our times! O sleeping priests! O more than Egyptian darkness! How secure we are amid all our evils."

The fullest treatment of the subject is contained in a sermon, formerly placed in the middle of 1516, but because of its similarity to the indulgence tracts of October, 1517, better assigned to the latter date.<sup>2</sup> Again Luther censures the unspiritual money-hungry methods of the commissaries but concedes that the language of the official bulls accords with church doctrine. The pope, he thinks, as custodian of the church's treasury of merit, has jurisdiction over the outward punishment which the church can apply or remit. His jurisdiction even extends to the souls in purgatory, but only *per suffragium*, which again is correct Catholic theory and means that though he does not have plenary power over them (otherwise, says Luther, he ought to release them at once and gratis, for mercy's sake) he can wield great influence before the tribunal of heaven through prayer — especially if the prayer is weighted with the proper satisfaction. Luther is not so sure that the pope's prayer really accomplishes what it purports to do. For his own part, he believes that true repentance frees one

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1) *WA*, I, 138.

2) *WA*, I, 65. As far as the extant sermons are concerned, there is little to indicate that the excitement of the ecclesiastical circles over the indulgence controversy had gripped the Wittenberg congregation or its preacher.



from purgatory without an indulgence, whereas imperfect repentance does not save one from it with one.

The next complete sermon on the subject, in 1518, shows a great advance.<sup>1</sup> By that time Luther has quite broken with the principles that underlay indulgences. The beauty of righteousness, not the fear of punishment or even the sorrow for sin, ought to be the motive for repentance. The latter is not an achievement of man nor the act of a moment. Rather it comes from above and is a lifelong process in which faith is the chief element.

The foil has now been laid for the chief gem in Luther's homiletical collection — justification by faith. To attempt to illuminate that principle in detail would mean to summarize half the sermon content of these years. We shall therefore restrict ourselves to the essential characteristics, the larger facets, as it were, of the jewel. The medieval preacher did not often dwell upon faith. When he used the word it connoted the idea of work — either an act of assent to the church dogma or a virtue which came by practice and brought merit. Thus John of Werden in the *Dormi Secure* collection might quote Augustine: "Faith is the mother of all virtue, the foundation of all good things," but when he illustrated the principle, faith became one of seven virtues, like patience and chastity, corresponding to the seven days of the week. At another time he adduced Augustine's saying that there could be no salvation without merit, no merit without grace, and no grace without prayer, thus exhibiting a peculiar intertwining of the grace and merit ideas.<sup>2</sup> Faith and justification

1) *WA*, I, 319; Walch, X, 1464.

2) *Sermones de sanctis*, Nos. 63 (for St. Martin) and 22 (de rogationibus).

are Pauline concepts and Luther in repopularizing them was harking back to the earliest literary expositions of Christianity.

The ultimate basis of faith as represented in the sermons is the suffering of Christ, or to go back still farther, the predestining will of God. The latter is not touched upon as often in the sermons, for obvious reasons, as it is, for instance, in the *Lectures on Romans*.<sup>1</sup> Christ's work supplies three things: satisfaction for sin, the power to put away sin and lead a clean life, and eternal salvation.<sup>2</sup> Nothing that we do or have, whether contrition, virtue, or faith (in so far as it is our work) can earn these gifts of God. It is true, we have in creation been endowed with the natural light of reason, but reason is blind to grace.<sup>3</sup>

If we then ask how Christ's merit is communicated to us, Luther would answer: through faith. But faith is itself a gift — not the reason for the gift.<sup>4</sup> It is divine illumination concerning God and His purpose with men — “nam credere est illuminari a deo et cognoscere deum, quo sciamus, quid nobiscum deus volet facere.”<sup>5</sup> From another point of view it is the psychological avenue of transmission from God to man via the Word. “Zcum glawben muess ein worth gehoerenn.”<sup>6</sup> “Der glawb und das worth wirth gantz ein ding und ein unuberwintlich ding.”<sup>7</sup> It is worth noting that Luther thus insists on anchoring the inner light to the outer word long before his experiences with the Enthusiasts. Now exactly what does he mean by the *Word*? Two things.

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1) Cf. *WA*, X, 1, I, 672 (postil) for an outspoken statement of it.

2) *Ibid.*, p. 124 f.

3) *Ibid.*, p. 203.

4) *Ibid.*, p. 125.

5) *WA*, IX, 481.

6) *WA*, IX, 625.

7) *Ibid.*, p. 639.

In the long run it is identical with the Scriptures. But first and foremost it is the gospel about Christ as contained in the Scriptures<sup>1</sup> and proclaimed by a living voice to the people. "Christians come together to hear the Word of God about Christ . . . Where the gospel is preached there alone we find Christ; that is our sign and there is none more certain."<sup>2</sup> In short it is the message preached to the *communio sanctorum*, the real church, or "hauff Christglewbiger leut,"<sup>3</sup> which is at one and the same time a visible church — the assembly of Christians — and an invisible church — because, faith being an inner, hidden quantity, God alone knows its true membership.<sup>4</sup> There the preacher brings the word to the ear, God conveys it to the heart.<sup>5</sup>

The heart becomes pregnant with the Holy Ghost, and Christ is born in us as he was in Mary, only spiritually.<sup>6</sup> Thus faith is a new life resulting from the union of two elements, the human or passive and the divine or active. The latter in its turn is not only the single historical sacrifice of Christ but the ceaseless working of His love in the heart of the sinner. Now, in the measure that a man has faith, that is, in the measure in which he has experienced and comprehended this divine activity, the latter is of value to him. "Wie er glaubt, so hat er, darumb so mag nymant wissen, das er in gnaden sey und got ihm guenstig sey, dan durch den glauben." If faith falters and one is afflicted with

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1) "... und lernt die schriefft gantz durch und durch nichts, dan wer diesser Christus sey, was er nutz seye, was wir von in hoffenn sollenn" *WA*, IX, 554).

2) *Ibid.*, p. 535.

3) *WA*, X, 1, I, 140.

4) *WA*, IX, 577.

5) *WA*, I, 124.

6) *WA*, IX, 625. The idea is often expressed in the sermons during the first part of 1521.

doubt, then it is time to go to the office of the keys to receive absolution and assurance from the priest.<sup>1</sup>

The benefits of Christ's passion are also transmitted through baptism and the eucharist in a similar manner, but Luther does not ascribe the power of creating faith to either sacrament. No one ought to take either sacrament who has not faith, for it will profit him nothing. The scholastics are wrong when they say that the sacrament gives virtue.<sup>2</sup>

Luther was accused even in these early days of preaching faith to the exclusion of works. It is true that he frequently fulminated against the external practices of contemporary piety and that he used sharp words about works in general which might cause offense or be misunderstood. But his doctrine, specifically his preaching, was nothing if not ethical. I do preach works, he tells his critics, but works that come from faith. If he did not stress the fruits as much as the life-giving vine that bore them, the reason was that for him fruits followed faith as necessarily as the day follows the rising sun. "Workless faith is unreal like a vision in a mirror," he once said.<sup>3</sup> A brief *résumé* of what he taught about the fruits of faith will show that to be true. The most important thing about works was the source from which they sprang and the attitude in which they were performed. The celebrated freedom of a Christian does not consist in doing no works but in refusing to bind them upon one's conscience as necessary.<sup>4</sup> Luther often dwelt on these questions but never

1) *WA*, II, 249.

2) *WA*, IX, 455. In these early years Luther emphasizes the commemorative character of the Lord's Supper and the comfort it will communicate if we come despairing yet believing. However, he enunciates his belief in both the *communicatio idiomatum* and the "real presence" (Cf. *Lectures on Romans*, ed. by Ficker, II, 10; *WA*, X, 1, I, 506).

3) *WA*, X, 1, II, 168.

4) *WA*, IX, 477.

better perhaps than in three sermons of similar titles preached respectively in 1518, 1519, and 1521.<sup>1</sup> He distinguishes three kinds of justice corresponding to three kinds of works. There are first what one might call the works of political justice, as that princes rule well and subjects obey in a general way and lead orderly lives. Then there are ceremonial or humanly appointed works, which have their value if they are not used to gain merit. Luther wishes the term merit had never been mentioned in the Bible, because of the misuse connected with it.<sup>2</sup> Then there are the works of love which arise out of faith and are done not out of fear of punishment, nor because of the promise of reward, nor yet out of a subtle pride,<sup>3</sup> but willingly for their own sake.

Or again, the preacher speaks of a double righteousness. The first comes to us extraneously from God in Christ, the second is the exercise of good works, which we do by virtue and in consummation of the first. The latter in its turn consists of three parts: the mortification of one's own flesh,<sup>4</sup> charity toward the neighbor, and humility and reverence toward God. In carrying out this program we follow the example of Christ and conform ourselves to his image. His work for us is the voice of the bridegroom, saying: "I am yours." Our works are the answer of the bride: "I am yours."

At other times Luther presents his own "social gospel." He points out that God requires only faith for

1) "De triplici iustitia," *WA*, II, 41 ff; "de duplici iustitia," *ibid.*, 143 ff. "Sermon von dreierlei guten Leben," *WA*, VII, 793 ff.

2) *WA*, IV, 63.

3) *WA*, II, 98; IV, 688 and often elsewhere.

4) By this he means works like fasting, waking, and the repetition of prayers, which serve one purpose and only one, to crucify the lusts of the flesh — even as one takes food away from a recalcitrant ass and piles a heavy load upon him "donec titillatio sistatur, biss Ihn der kutzel vor-gebett" (*WA*, IV, 636).



Himself. Every other expression of the Christ spirit in us belongs to the neighbor. The Christian must go out of his way to find and help the poor, the sick, and the frail. He must learn to associate with the stubborn, the foolish, the proud, and other unpleasant types of people. Those who do not tolerate them become founders of sects and heresies, disunion and other evils.<sup>1</sup> A Christian lives in this world not to find, but to make, pious, righteous, and holy people, just as he also seeks to make rich, strong, and healthy those who are poor, weak, and sick.<sup>2</sup>

The natural way for Christians to fulfill the works of brotherly love is within and through their callings—but not by virtue of them. The distinction is important. Luther uses the amusing illustration of a shoemaker and a tailor who each sought to win new apprentices by assuring them that they would be serving the Lord in a special sense by becoming shoemakers or tailors, respectively.<sup>3</sup> On the same level are the arguments ascribing extraordinary merit to the estate of priests or monks. Only one calling as such has a status before God—the spiritual calling of those who have faith.<sup>4</sup> All others are alike before Him, provided, of course, that they are consistent with Christian virtue. There is no difference between lay and clerical. The stroke of a thresher is as meritorious as a psalm sung by a Carthusian.<sup>5</sup> The swineherd serves God as well as the priest celebrating mass. The heel is also a member of the body even though the stomach, ears, and head be more important.<sup>6</sup>

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1) *WA*, VII, 481.

2) *WA*, X, 1, II, 71.

3) *WA*, X, 1, I, 491.

4) *WA*, X, 1, II, 71.

5) *WA*, VII, 244.

6) *WA*, IV, 669.

Only the position of the monks is different. Luther can conceive of some who entered the monastery with the correct attitude and have it even now. But most monks intend to gain greater merit. By the end of 1521 he is ready to advise them to abandon their calling. In the "Weihnachtspostille" he argues at length and with penetration that to continue as they are would be sacrilege, to break their vows, the lesser evil.<sup>1</sup>

Luther's moral is a high one. "The judgment of God is of an infinite exactitude. Nothing is so fine that it is not considered enormous in His sight."<sup>2</sup> The law is spiritual in its demand. If it is not fulfilled with a willing heart, it is not fulfilled at all.<sup>3</sup> But this spirit of free willingness can only be imparted by the Holy Ghost. But here, incidentally, is the difference for Luther between the spiritual side of the law and the gospel. Jerome and Origen erred, he says, as did also the schoolmen, when they virtually equated the gospel with the spiritual interpretation of the law as laid down in the Sermon on the Mount.<sup>4</sup> They called it the *nova lex*, whereas it is not a demand at all, but a donation. To perform a spiritual work does not mean to fulfill the spiritual demand of the law, but to be inspired by the gospel spirit of freedom and gladness through faith.

We may close this discussion of faith and works with a few statements from a sermon that recall the "Treatise on the Freedom of a Christian Man":

God wants the heart alone . . . men look upon the works. . . . Therefore, when we have become united with God and believe that He has made us

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1) *WA*, X, 1, I, 681-709. At this time he also wrote the treatise "de votis monasticis" (*WA*, VIII).

2) *Lectures on Romans*, ed. by Ficker, p. 128.

3) *WA*, I, 462; VII, 473.

4) *WA*, IX, 437.

holy, . . . we are to remember what we must do before the people. For though the soul is free in the sight of God, our existence belongs to our brethren. . . . When I come away from my soul and go among the people, I am in another land where my passport is not valid and I must pay duty. In the kingdom of heaven and of the soul we have perfect freedom, but our bodies are in an alien kingdom in which it is our duty to act as it befits and benefits our neighbors among whom we live.<sup>1</sup>

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1) *Ibid.*, p. 567.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE CONTENT OF THE SERMONS AS IT REVEALS THE CHARACTER OF THE AGE AND OF THE PREACHER

#### The Sermons as Social and Cultural Pictures of the Time

In the history of the pulpit there have been some preachers like Geiler or Bernardino who used so many concrete illustrations in their preaching that their sermons have become noted as mirrors of the age. Others again achieved their fame chiefly by "preaching to the times," which in Puritan parlance meant preaching on the crisis of the hour. Still others observed a detached attitude and occupied themselves chiefly with topics of universal religious interest. All three types of preaching occur in Luther's early sermons, but the last predominates. One is often surprised to find how doctrinally objective he could be in the midst of a stirring crisis. A good example is the timeless message of those famous eight sermons which he preached on eight consecutive days on his return from the Wartburg and by which he quelled the turmoil in his home town and achieved in many ways the most signal results of his pulpit career. It is not surprising, however, to find his sermons filled with "preaching to the times" also, when one considers that the medieval church and world were being lifted out of their tracks in those years. It is most in evidence in Luther's early criticisms of con-

ditions in the church and in his later polemic against the papacy.

And though it is not characteristic of him to inject much picturesque detail into his sermons, he disregarded this general principle at least once in his early career and gave full play to his talent for observing and describing the more intimate sides of life. In certain parts of the "Sermons on the Ten Commandments." 1516-17,<sup>1</sup> we have pictures of popular manners even more colorful than those of Geiler, and a few passages in the "Weihnachtspostille" are not far behind in concrete detail.

The remarkable thing about the series on the Decalogue is that it comprised the second half of those twin sermons whose first part, as we have seen, dealt so preponderantly with the inward, mystical side of religion. Jacoby offers a very satisfying explanation for the glaring cleavage manifested in these sermons. They represent, he believes, the two religious strains in Luther, the mystical and the ethical, but at a time when they had not yet been fused and integrated in his personality.<sup>2</sup> Be that as it may, the Decalogue sermons not only provide a fascinating cross section of the life of the times, but also reveal the attitude of the late medieval preacher toward certain practical questions and the way in which he dealt with them in the pulpit. In what now follows we will attempt to visualize the picture as Luther drew it. Besides the sermons on the Decalogue, all the others have been drawn upon also. An *obiter dictum* or an illustration set down without premeditation here and there in them often adds an extra dash of color.

1) *WA*, I, 398 ff.

2) H. Jacoby, *Luthers vorreformatorsche Predigt* (Koenigsberg, 1883), p. 16.



The first commandment, he says, is transgressed by outward and inward idolatry. We are all guilty of the latter — for instance, when in our hearts we worship riches or honor — and it is only the merit of Christ that can help us in our predicament. But in order that the simple-minded may the better understand, Luther will describe certain crude forms of the outward transgression — not all of them, for they are almost infinite in number. And for clearness sake he will divide them into those which are indulged in mainly in youth, in the prime of life, and in old age.

In reading the long list of superstitions which he now presents to his hearers (only the most characteristic ones will be given here), it is well to remember that in this respect he was simply a child of his time. Two parallel but opposite modes of thought regarding superstitions had been growing up in the late medieval period. In the first place there had been an uncanny access of the delusion about witches and witchcraft in the popular mind — not to a small extent the result of a papal bull on the subject by Innocent VIII. The publication of the papally sanctioned *Witches' Hammer* by Sprenger and Kraemer in 1489<sup>1</sup> had also given a new impetus to the delusion as well as to the sinister methods of combating its practice.

On the other hand, a few of the enlightened minds of the fifteenth century, like Gerson and Pico, were beginning to cast doubt on some phases of superstition. The discovery of the new world and of new peoples and the later progress of the Reformation also tended to undermine many of its crudest forms. But a perusal of such a history of superstition as Thorndike's will soon convince one that even the most advanced thinkers

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1) Trans. into English by M. Summers (London, 1928).

were themselves still under the ban of the most naive credulity.<sup>1</sup> They might doubt the virtue of astrology and yet believe implicitly in the portentous nature of comets. The following account will show that Luther belonged to this class. Next to the mighty fortress which is God, so Meyer puts it, there dwelt for him the ugliest brood of demons.<sup>2</sup> Most of the practices alluded to by Luther are well-known in the history of witchcraft.<sup>3</sup> But his treatment of the whole subject is nevertheless highly original. Especially intriguing is the way in which he ridicules many of the practices or half humorously suggests their probable derivation. Very characteristic also is his habit of using the Bible as a criterion in determining whether they are fact or fancy, legitimate or illegitimate.

But let us now hear his views and criticisms on the subject. It seems that some young people, he begins by saying, charm swords, arrows, and guns with words or signs and thus make themselves invulnerable, or they draw a circle in the sand and uncharm what others have charmed for their own benefit. Others again write a few letters or signs on a piece of glass and throw it into the fire or they do the same with an ass's head. In each case they seek to constrain another person to love or to follow them. Some display letters written in supposedly holy characters and signs of magic power, which ostensibly were sent by Pope Leo to the Emperor Charles, though the chronicles show that these two were not even contemporaries.<sup>4</sup> Others watch the moon closely

1) Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic* (New York, 1934), vol. IV.

2) E. A. Meyer, *Mythologie d. Germanen* (Strassburg, 1903), pp. 63 f.

3) Cf. J. T. McNeill, "Folk-Paganism in the Penitentials," *Journal of Religion*, XIII, 450 ff.

4) Did Luther mean Leo X, 1513-21, and the fourteenth century Emperor Charles IV, who certainly were not contemporary? Or was he thinking of Leo III and Charlemagne and therefore himself mistaken, since the latter two were contemporary?

for the best time to choose a wife, to have, or not to have, children. They steal wax from the Easter candle or holy water from the basin. By the latter they hope to find an egg in an anthill which will make them invisible when they venture out. Holy water is also used to find out thieves. The procedure is to write the names of suspected persons on slips and throw them into the consecrated water. The slip bearing the name of the thief will sink to the bottom. Further aberrations are the belief that who falls asleep first on the wedding night will die first or that if a woman touches the threshold and mutters certain words as she enters her husband's house the first time, she will know who is to be the boss in the family. Through these things young people learn to trust the creature in small things and to forget God in the great things.

The age of manhood — rather womanhood, for women are especially prone to these delusions — is tempted by practices such as the following. Some try to banish sickness in children by hanging written slips about their neck. Of course, the paper and the ink must not be of the ordinary variety — and the time and the place of writing neither. Even priests and sextons furnish such slips, in imitation of witches. Many other outlandish diagnostic and curative methods are applied to sick children. Magic arts are also used to protect cattle. Why, Luther asks, cheat the poor wolf of the share God has allotted to him? Suppose Job had used this hocuspocus. He might have saved all his flock, but what would the Lord have said? Some by incantations set the devil to watch over their fields. This would be especially obnoxious to Luther, for in another sermon he asserts that pestilence and crop diseases

come from the devils in the air and that that is why one reads the gospels out in the fields. The demons are weakened and the air is cleansed through the efficacy of the holy Word of God.<sup>1</sup> Others believe in fantastic lore about critical illnesses, that if they take a vow while they are sick they may not take any more medicine or that if anyone has received extreme unction and recovers he must wear black and not dance or have any relations with the opposite sex for a year. Or they, like the old heathen, discover meanings in the calls of birds, particularly those of the raven.

The preacher is especially sarcastic with those who choose special (Egyptian) days for doing certain things, as engaging in some form of business, letting blood, weaning children, sowing grain, and the like. The best doctors say that nothing but need should dictate the choice of the day, but such folks still persist. Perhaps they may yet discover that fire is most comfortable in winter and that summer is the best time for making hay. Fortunately, not many really take these silly things seriously.

Then the preacher comes to his "dear astrology." Astrologers can tell you whether you will be a barber, singer, banker, fisher, speaker, or philanderer, but they haven't been able to tell who will be a sinner and who righteous. Sin comes from the heart, not from the stars. If Josephus said that Abraham taught the Egyptians astrology, he only added one more lie to the many he told. Further, if the stars are so powerful, why haven't they changed the nature of the devils, who dwell in the air and are much closer to their influence than we are. His conclusions, based chiefly on Scripture, are similar

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1) *WA*, II, 178 (Sermon v. d. Gebet und Prozession in der Kreuzwoche").

to those expressed in other sermons.<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 4:19, "lest . . . when thou seest the sun, moon and the stars (thou) shouldest be driven to worship them," clinches the argument against astrology. Of course, by the same token, Luther follows Scripture when it points in the opposite direction. Christ's discourses on the signs that will precede the last day make it certain for him that we must look forward to unusual happenings in the skies — but without fear, for they are signs of a merciful God.<sup>2</sup> He is very much interested in comets, one of his first sermons having reference to one,<sup>3</sup> and in the "Weihnachtspostille" he enjoins the view upon his readers that the heavenly bodies are set for signs as well as for services to mankind. Eclipses and comets, he says, are most surely the harbingers of misfortune.<sup>4</sup> In the gospel sermon for the second Sunday in Advent he even inclines to give credence to a certain astrological prediction of a great deluge, which he hoped would usher in the end of the world.<sup>5</sup> The wish may have been father to the thought in this case.

To return to the first commandment, we now are informed about the transgressions of old age, which our preacher promptly identifies with the old hags or witches — women have inherited the propensity for being fooled from their first mother, Eve.<sup>6</sup> First, there are such evil practices as crystal gazing, conjuring up spirits, signing bargains or having intercourse (*succubi*

1) *WA*, X, 1, I, 566 ("Weihnachtspostille").

2) *WA*, IV, 622.

3) *WA*, IV, 597.

4) *WA*, X, 1, I, 570 ff.

5) *WA*, X, 1, II, 107 ff. ("Adventspostille").

6) Such disparaging remarks about women occur elsewhere in the early sermons. *WA*, IX, 665: "Die weiber bedeuten die sinlickeit, ein schwache person." *WA*, X, 1, I, 664: the itinerant penance preacher has women in his power — "hatt das arm thier gefangen, gilt yhm wol mehr denn szo viel melkende kue." Luther, as well as the medieval preacher, knew nothing of our modern glorification of the fair sex, except only in the case of the Virgin and a few female saints.



and *incubi*) with the devil, and controlling the weather. Luther was very sure on the last point and spent several minutes later in his sermon convincing doubters that witches actually could make the weather, as well as bring harm to children and cattle. Again the Bible, with its accounts of the plagues of Egypt and similar happenings, decided the issue for him. More than a dozen years later he one Sunday at the end of his sermon addressed a very pertinent warning to certain witches, known to him, who made weather, stole milk, and also shot people. They evidently did not repent of their evil ways, for on the following Sunday he solemnly consigned them to the devil. "That," says the note-taker, "was the first ban Luther announced."<sup>1</sup>

An interesting reference in our sermon is to Frau Herodias, or Hulde or Venus, as some called her. This lady made regular tours of cleansing on earth and occasionally left coals here and there which turned into gold. Frau Hulde later became a standard term with Luther for human reason — in the derogatory sense. He thus uses it in the postils.<sup>2</sup>

Other foolish beliefs are that every house harbors a number of goblins or that one must cross oneself after meeting a priest. The preacher will not speak of the strange uses to which *menstrua mulierum* are put or of the bizarre rites performed during or after the birth of children, as tying cheese and verbena on those about to be baptized, or trying to fatten an emaciated child by placing him in a kettle of water that is heated gradually while some one runs around the house three times and calls in at all the windows, "What are you cooking?"<sup>3</sup>

1) Werdermann, *Wittenberger Gemeinde*, p. 110.

2) *W.A.*, X, 1, I, 326; X, 1, II, 105.

3) This was a variation of a very ancient practice often listed as an offense in the medieval penitential books. Cf. J. T. McNeill: *op. cit.*, p. 453.

Now, though witchcraft is a very real thing and achieves its results through the devil's aid, there are two things that are not only forbidden, but forbidden to be believed. These are that witches can change themselves to cats at night and that they ride about on broomsticks to attend witches' sabbaths. Where that actually seems to occur, it is an illusion of the devil, and the preacher cites legends from Geiler and the *Vitae Patrum* to prove his point.

In a less crude way people transgress the first commandment under the guise of religion, as for instance, in the worship of saints, in connection with which Luther finds many things to object to. People usually ask the saints only for mundane things, rarely for those great spiritual gifts which they lived and even died for. Furthermore, there are too many saints and too many holidays instituted ostensibly to do them honor, but really to provide another chance for excessive eating and drinking.<sup>1</sup> A veritable pantheon of new saints is being raised on the heathen model. Each one is trailed by a set of doubtful legends and noted for some special service, whereas one ought to know that "all saints can give all things." Thus people believe that Anna gives riches, Juliana and Ottilie are eye doctors, Apollonia controls toothache, and Scholastica thunder. The traditions about these specialized services, Luther thinks, are the result of crude folk etymology. St. Sepastian wards off the pest because his name *past* sounds like pest. Similarly Valentin is thought to curb the falling sickness and Vincentius to find lost articles, because their names remind people of *fallen* and *finden*.<sup>2</sup> Another nui-

1) In another sermon, in 1521, Luther blames the pope and his canon law for the great multiplication of saints and holidays. (*WA*, 7, 793).

2) Luther does not seem to have been the first one to note such similarities. In France St. Vincent was the patron of vinedressers because

sance in this connection is for societies like the guilds or brotherhoods to espouse a particular saint as their patron and claim extraordinary powers for him in opposition to the patron of some rival society.<sup>1</sup> The tendency to exalt the virtues of the saints was all too common anyway. One ought also to preach how they fell to show that after all they were saved by God's grace just as we hope to be.<sup>2</sup>

The erection of shrines is also going on apace and people are travelling great distances for what they can have in fuller measure at home.<sup>3</sup> Abuses of all sorts are connected with these pilgrimages, but unfortunately the clergy are abetting the custom for the sake of gain. The rapturous urge to go places for the soul, which is said to be affecting servants and women<sup>4</sup> in particular, might, however, be cured by the application of a good oaken cross to the body.

Yet barring these abuses, Luther on the whole sanctions calling upon saints, even for purely physical troubles. He would not wish to lend moral support to the stupid Picards and other sectaries who forbid praying to them altogether. Those critics especially are in the wrong who cry out against him that he disparages prayer — or good works in general. From this we see that many objected to Luther's pulpit utterances as early

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his name contained the French word for wine, *vin*. Cf. H. Lucas, *The Renaissance and the Reformation* (New York, 1934), p. 146.

1) The brotherhoods were associations of laymen, or of monks and laymen, for devotional or charitable purposes. There were said to have been twenty-one in Wittenberg alone. Luther often fulminates against them, partly because of the reason given above and partly because of their addiction to hilarious celebrations. Cf. *WA*, II, 742, for a treatise devoted in part to them.

2) *WA*, I, 276 (in a Passion sermon).

3) References to pilgrimages are frequent in the sermons. Most mentioned as examples are St. Jacob zu Compostella, St. Peter zu Rom, Jerusalem, der heilige Rock zu Trier.

4) Cf. Berthold of Regensburg's sentence: "Einer Frauen Romfahrt und einer Henne Flug ueber den Zaun sind gleich viel neutze." (Quoted in Cruel, *op. cit.*, p. 319).

as 1516. It may also account for the contradictory statements concerning saint worship that one finds side by side in the sermons. By 1522, however, when he wrote the "Adventspostille," Luther is ready to condemn saint worship in its entirety, chiefly because it is unscriptural, though he admits that there may be a few persons who worship them and the Holy Virgin correctly, namely as special instances of the great work of God.<sup>1</sup>

The sermons on the second commandment<sup>2</sup> furnish little material for our present purpose, being concerned chiefly with the subject of oaths of every variety. The preacher offers a list of those in popular use which do not differ essentially from our modern ones. Among those who transgress the third commandment are the people who think the festival day is there only for eating, drinking, and wearing fine clothes.<sup>3</sup> It has become the custom in fact, to keep the vigils, or evenings before the festivals, by fasting and to indulge the flesh on the festival proper. The reader will recognize in this description the so-called "continental Sabbath" which so shocked the Puritans when it was introduced by Eu-

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1) *WA*, X, 1, II, 83. Luther's sermons on Mary give evidence of how deeply the reverence for the Mother of God was implanted in medieval minds. In a sermon of 1516 (*WA*, I, 79) he addresses her thus: "O blessed Mother! O most worthy Virgin! Remember us, and grant that God may do such great things even unto us!" But already here the emphasis has shifted from the greatness of her work to the greatness of the work done to her. "She is to be revered, but only for her Son's sake." Nevertheless, Mary remains his ideal (cf. the enthusiastic picture of her as a humble housemaid in the *Magnificat* of 1521 — *WA*, VII, 575) the bright star in the twilight that to him is woman.

2) The non-Lutheran reader will have to bear in mind that Luther followed Roman Catholic usage and omitted the commandment concerning the adoration of images. His second is therefore the third of all other Protestant churches, his third, their fourth, and so on. To arrive at the number of ten the tenth commandment is divided into two parts, called the ninth and the tenth.

2) In the "Sermon von dem Gebet und Procession in der Kreuzwoche" Luther deplores the same custom during the festival processions. Too many only want to show off and have a merry time. The villagers are notoriously bad. They carry their crosses and banners into the taverns and drink to excess. It might be better for the bishops to prohibit all processions (*WA*, II, 178).

ropean immigrants in our country in the middle of the last century.

Luther specifies in detail how much and what kind of work may be done legitimately on the Sabbath. All necessary occupations, like those of cooks, taverns (*Schenken*), butchers, bakers, fishermen, doctors, messengers, and letter carriers, or those that mend roads and bridges, or fight enemies or fire, may be engaged in. He is not at all squeamish about a reasonable amount of work — to carry a keg of beer into the cellar is certainly not so bad as to carry the beer out in all sorts of cans. But as for the practice of the Wittenbergers to shoot birds on Sundays or to practice with arms — that can be done as well on other days.

The commandment is fulfilled in five ways, the first and second of which are attending mass and hearing the Word of God. The preacher raises the question whether one may attend only early mass or mass in the cloister. The answer is, yes, if the chief service is not neglected wilfully. But he doesn't like the tendency to run elsewhere to the fields and neighboring villages to church — that offers too many chances for wanton frolicking. People are urged in accordance with the counsels of the church to attend extra preaching services in the afternoon. But Luther is very much dissatisfied with the parish preaching of his time. "The priests are forced to do it and don't." He dislikes — as did Geiler also — the current prohibition which kept people under the ban from attending the sermon. How can they repent if they do not hear the Word of God?<sup>1</sup>

The fourth commandment suggests to the preacher

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1) Luther's idea during the early period was that excommunication was a remedy for salvation, a whip in the hands of mother church. But those in charge ought not to excommunicate a man for four groschen (*WA*, IV, 613).



some topics that only skirt its central content. Some sound psychological hints are offered on how to bring up children. He undoubtedly has his own austere boyhood in mind when he cautions parents not to inspire their children with fear. They ought not to hire nursemaids who fill their young minds with superstitious fears of the dark and with stories of monsters and the like. This bit of advice is paralleled by Reginald Scott's argument in his *Discovery of Witches*, 1584, that the wide prevalence of the belief in witches was the result of the tales which superstitious maids implanted in the young minds under their care. But some parents are, alas, more concerned about providing their children with fine clothes than with spiritual gifts. Thus the scene is laid for a digression on a favorite theme of the preachers of all times — finery in women. With Luther the chief emphasis is on the costly and fantastic qualities of the styles, though he does once exclaim, "I believe they will soon go about naked, for they do go half-naked already." He doesn't know whom to blame really, the women themselves, the men, or the city authorities — for not making laws against so much wasteful prinking. And as for the men — well, they have recently adopted the silly style of wearing their hair in nets. But the real trouble is that they are not strict enough with their wives, and Luther dedicates several goodly sized paragraphs to the valiant cause of showing that men are and ought to be masters in their homes. As a general rule, a woman may consider that she is wearing enough ornament when she pleases her husband.

The relation of servants to masters and of the people to spiritual and temporal authorities is touched upon.

There is much complaint, says Luther, about cheating, wasting of time, and charging too high wages among artisans and laborers. Furthermore, the whole commandment is in danger of being annulled as it was in the days of the Jews, because it is supposed to be more virtuous to endow churches and to donate paintings and liturgical vessels than to give to one's parents, one's friends, or to the needy.<sup>1</sup>

Luther differs with the standard theologians of his time in their interpretations of the Ten Commandments. They argue, for instance, that God does not expect men to fulfill the fifth commandment in love and that it is fulfilled when men do not commit murder. That, Luther thinks, is to hem in the all-embracing quality of God's demands. The ninth and tenth commandments as well as the spiritual interpretations of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount show that no man keeps the law unless he keeps it in thought, word, and deed and out of love for God. Thus with the fifth commandment Luther spends most of his time in speaking against anger and the sins of the tongue — on the analogy, respectively, of Matthew 5:20f and of the famous passage in the Epistle of James. The philosophers long ago noticed that a man had two ears and one tongue. When Esop was once asked to bring the worst and best meats, he brought tongues. There is a good reason why the monasteries have laid down the rule of silence for monks — only the devil spoilt the good work by introducing logic, that most garrulous teacher of garrulousness. If any one doubts the evils of the tongue, let him ask a man who has a wordy and quarrelsome wife.

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1) Luther spoke more favorably of the practice of giving money to churches as a manifestation of the Christian spirit in the Epistle sermon for the Epiphany in the postil (*WA*, X, 1, I, 554).

What the preacher has to say about the next commandment smells strongly of the monastery and was not perhaps spoken exactly as it is written. Luther knows individuals who do not partake of the sacrament because they have not been able to mortify their desires. To such he would speak words of comfort. God sends these afflictions to humble us in our self-esteem. The wheel must go through the mud but its main purpose dare not falter. The sermons also exhibit the double tendency of monkery on the one hand to view the normal relations of the sexes with suspicion and on the other to go into fulsome detail.<sup>1</sup> One of the divisions utilized in the treatment of the subject groups sexual sins according as they are visual, verbal, tactual, osculatory, or factual. Among the things that lead to immorality Luther lists the unsavory legends used by the preachers and teachers, the obscene stories told in the taverns (many of them about the supposed philanderings of the clergy), public dances, and fancy dresses of women.

In dealing with the seventh commandment Luther voices an enlightened plea for more leniency in the punishments for theft. To take a life for the sake of property is to act too severely, not to say unjustly, especially when the goods were taken because of bodily need or poverty. Altogether reprehensible are the harsh sentences meted out for stealing church property. The powers that be are too argus-eyed for their miserable money and goods, while adultery, simony, and cheat-

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1) Luther had not yet learned the bit of wisdom which he applied so well in his explanation to the sixth commandment in the Catechism. Surgant had already stated it in his *Manual* (part i, consid. 16): "Si loquitur contra, luxuriam; sufficit quod laudet castitatem."

ing go unpunished.<sup>1</sup> The preacher condemns the predatory raids of the robber barons and takes a stand against usury, especially as it is practiced among the Jews, and against gambling,<sup>2</sup> discussing in some detail the question as to whether restitution ought to be demanded of the winner. He answers in the negative. He allows the practice of "buying income"<sup>3</sup> for certain people, such as the old or sick, the religious, prelates, princes, and councillors.

The following classes may consider themselves as bearers of false witness in the transgression of the eighth commandment: heretics like the Picards (Waldenses); the scholastics, who through the application of the four-fold sense to Scripture find that it teaches salvation by works; the jurists, who "in their labyrinth" seek victory not truth, to prolong the strife instead of bringing about peace; those that teach Aristotle and are serious about it — if Luther had his way the great Greek would be taught for six months, long enough to know him for what he was;<sup>4</sup> the disseminators of legends and fables — among whom the preachers in their sermons bear the palm; the fawners and flatterers at court. Luther

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1) In the sermon for the Epiphany, 1521 (*WA*, VII, 238) he gives as the reason for papal objection to his preaching the fear "es gang inen ab von irem bettelsack." If the people were correctly informed about works they would neglect the pope with his scribes and "Pergamen, rot schnuer, wachs, sigel und der gleichen gaucklerey." Luther is also against making the payment of tithes obligatory. The Old Testament injunction does not apply to the New, as the juriconsults teach (*WA*, IV, 610).

2) This section reminds one of John Herolt's second sermon for Christmas day on "Dicing." Cf. *supra*, p. 63.

3) "Buying income" was a practice of the time in which the buyer paid "a sum of money to the seller, in consideration of which the seller agreed to pay to the buyer a certain percentage of the purchase price annually in perpetuity . . . It was a loan disguised as a sale." *Luther's Works*, Philadelphia ed., Vol. IV. Luther described it more fully in his treatise "On Trading and Usury." *WA*, XV, 279 ff.

4) Luther very frequently in his sermons expressed his dislike of Aristotle. This aversion may be explained in part as his personal reaction to the pseudo-Aristotelian dialectical system with which every university student of those times was glutted, and in part by Aristotle's unlutheran emphasis in ethics: Man becomes virtuous by practicing virtue. Cf. F. Nitsch, *Luther and Aristoteles* (Kiel, 1883).

even frowns upon suing for one's real or supposed rights in court. That is allowed only for the protection of others.<sup>1</sup>

In summing up his remarks on the Decalogue Luther criticises the tendency of his times to catalogue and grade the sins, especially in the confessional, so that the people are more concerned about not forgetting the divisions than in remembering their sins. Thus, for example, some divide them into two classes: sins of omission and commission; some into three: sins of heart, word, and deed; others again, according to the five senses or the six works of mercy, the seven sacraments, the seven deadly sins, the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, the eight beatitudes — and so on up to fourteen. He himself concludes his sermon series with a very realistic review of the seven deadly sins.

In contrast to the sermons just considered, all the others together yield only meagre gleanings in the way of references to the cultural or social background. Lightning struck churches more often than ordinary houses already in those days. To the preacher that is a sign of God's dissatisfaction with the church's externalism.<sup>2</sup> He speaks of a unique clock in Nuremberg which indicates 7:00 A. M. as the first hour, 8:00 as the second, and so on through the day.<sup>3</sup> The discovery of America is mentioned once — "ist doch newlich viel inseln und land funden,"<sup>4</sup> and the superb qualities of *Malvasier* wine are alluded to.<sup>5</sup> He complains that one cannon ball nowadays stretches two hundred men, and yet people

1) The same conclusion is reached in the sermon "On the double Righteousness" (*WA*, II, 151).

2) *WA*, I, 96.

3) *WA*, I, 133.

4) *WA*, X, 1, I, 21.

5) *WA*, X, 1, II, 199. A certain widow in Frankfurt had sent him two measures of it while he was on the way to Worms.



sing songs about it. But it is matter for weeping.<sup>1</sup> In one sermon a comparison of the canonical hours to life gives us a glimpse into the nightly routine of the monastery. The monks rise soon after midnight from their soundest sleep to signify that we are to be prepared for the bridegroom's coming even in the vigor of life. Another remark in the same sermon betrays the medieval monkish distrust of women and marriage. "He who takes a wife increases his domestic cares — O, how difficult it then is to hate the life of the body!"<sup>2</sup> Luther refers to the custom of "distributing the New Year" in the form of figurative presents to the people from the pulpit, only to ridicule it,<sup>3</sup> while he deprecates the tendency in the Passion sermons to heap abuse on the Jews and to forget one's own sins thereby.<sup>4</sup>

That Luther was grateful to the reigning house of Saxony for supporting him and for governing the country well may be gathered from passages in several sermons. As the head is to the body, he once says, as the ruler is to the state, so is Christ to the church — the chief part, through whom life flows to the members.<sup>5</sup> He believed that outward justice was followed by outward blessings. That is why the Lord had blessed the princes of Saxony with peace and silver mines.<sup>6</sup> The following encomium may well be taken as his tribute to Frederick the Wise: "wer eyn gnedigen fursten hat, der furcht keyn ding, das unter demselbigen fursten ist, trotzt dar-

1) *WA*, IV, 651.

2) *WA*, IV, 714. But by 1520 he has "often urged all young people to marry." *WA*, IX, 489.

3) *WA*, X, 1, I, 504.

4) *WA*, IX, 651. Cf. also II, 138 ("Sermon v. Betrachtung d. heiligen Leidens Christi," 1519).

5) *WA*, IV, 715.

6) *WA*, II, 44.

auff, rhumet und bekennet seynes herrn gnad und macht . . .”<sup>1</sup>

It was different with the people and the students of Wittenberg. It is well known that his later dissatisfaction with them several times induced him to keep away from the pulpit and to threaten to leave Wittenberg. He was much wrought up over some differences between students and citizens in the summer of 1520 and preached a sermon on July 15th against tumult and rebellion.<sup>2</sup> In March, 1521, he spent the last part of his sermon in a peevish complaint about their lack of interest in his message. They look upon it as *gauckelspil*. If he had built chapels they would all have come running. With a pointed reference to Christ’s word, “It will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrha, etc.,” he warns them to take his words more seriously.<sup>3</sup> Incidentally, the writer finds in his notes only one reference by the preacher to his fatherland and that one throws a peculiar light on certain tenets of present-day Naziism: “Wir sagen: Gantz Deutschland ist itzund Christen, darumb das die alte heidnische weysse ist nymmer drinnen, ob wol das weniger teyl recht Christen sind, wirts dennoch umb yhren willen alles Christen genennet.”<sup>4</sup>

A modern scholar has written an article on Luther’s treatment of painters in the Wartburgpostille, based on a few scattered remarks here and there on the subject.<sup>5</sup> The painters who depicted hell as an open dragon’s mouth and the door of heaven closed had unwittingly be-

1) *WA*, X, 1, I, 717.

2) Koestlin, *op. cit.*, I, 318.

3) *WA*, IX, 636 f.

4) *WA*, X, 1, I, 555.

5) Gustav Bossert: “Die Maler in Luthers Wartburgpostille” *Christliches Kunstblatt*, 1897, No. 7. The present writer was unable to procure a copy.

come the prophets of the time.<sup>1</sup> He disagrees with those who paint the rod of Jesse as a tree rising from Jesse and ending in Christ. The rod of Jesse is Christ, and to be painted correctly, ought to show Christ's suffering and its fruits.<sup>2</sup> What would it help, he exclaims at another time, to daub silver and gold on the walls, stones, and wood, or who would be bettered if every village had ten bells as large as those of Erfurt, or if mass were said continuously day and night as at Meissen, or there were in all churches more silver and treasures than at Halle or Wittenberg?<sup>3</sup> When St. Elizabeth came to a certain cloister and saw the Passion of Christ beautifully painted on the walls, she said: "You might have spared the cost to nourish your body, for the Passion must be engraved in the heart."<sup>4</sup>

Most of the other references in the sermons that can possibly be construed as reflections of the cultural and social conditions come under the heading of the "time's abuse" in religion. Criticisms of the church were not uncommon among writers and preachers in the late medieval age. One need only read Erasmus or Geiler of Kaisersberg to become aware of that fact. A single quotation from the latter will show how far a preacher in good standing could go in this respect.

"Take the spiritual estate," says Geiler, "bishops, pope, cardinals, provosts, pastors. Look upon it and you will find so much vanity and arrogance that no one can give us enough honor or fill us up. We multiply benefices one upon another and always desire a higher office. What shall I say about unchastity?

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1) *WA*, X, 1, I, 36.

2) *WA*, X, 1, II, 91.

3) *Ibid.*, 39.

4) *WA*, X, 1, I, 258—cf. also p. 561.

Who is there that does not defile himself in the mud-puddle and filth? If you take the monastic estate, you will observe how completely it is disrupted. Its members are rascals and stand among the first in every self-indulgence, as is the case in the secular and spiritual estates."<sup>1</sup>

The main lines of the gloomy picture drawn by Luther were thus sketched before his time, and the complaints about the laxity and greed which prevailed in certain parts of the ecclesiastical system were more than a hundred years old. In his earliest sermons Luther voiced these complaints anew. But he very soon introduced a new note which was alien to the late medieval preachers of Germany. They had leveled their censures not at the system, but at the abuses in the system. Luther became more and more convinced that the system itself was to blame.

After the break had finally come, his polemic became sharper and more incessant. The pope, whom he had criticised by name for the first time in a sermon of February 15, 1517,<sup>2</sup> came to be the symbol not only of the system but of its corruption, the true Antichrist.<sup>3</sup> The description that follows is taken from a small number of sermons in the latter part of our period. It might be duplicated by what is said in others. Indeed it is a rare thing to find a sermon after 1517 that could not contribute its bit of coloring to the picture. It must be admitted that the latter, though based on actuality, is somewhat distorted by the intensity of the conflict. One ought to remember Kolde's advice, given as long ago

1) This excerpt is quoted by Cruel, *op. cit.*, p. 89, from the *Ameisen*, fol. 20.

2) *WA*, I, 135.

3) Cf. H. Preuss, *Die Vorstellung vom Antichrist im spaeteren Mittelalter und bei Luther* (Leipzig, 1906).

as 1879: "The writings of the Reformers can hardly be considered as secondary sources (for the pre-Reformation period)."<sup>1</sup>

In the first place Luther believes that judgment day is close at hand.<sup>2</sup> Never in the last 1500 years has there been such building and planting, so many costly foods and drinks, such expensive clothes. Trade is engulfing the whole world; new arts, painting and etching, are appearing; people are learned and pry into everything, so that a youngster of twenty now knows more than twenty doctors did formerly. In addition there are languages and sciences — printing, guns, and other implements of war. In material things there is unprecedented progress.

But the retrogression in the spiritual sphere is even greater. The council of Constance publicly condemned the gospel, the pope's lies have become universal laws, and he is "skinning the people to the marrow." The sacrifice of the mass is repeated many hundred thousand times a day and untold numbers are being chased to hell through penance, sacrament, indulgences, and laws. Greater blindness and blasphemy than now rule in Christendom through bishops, cloisters, and universities are impossible. The dead blind heathen Aristotle teaches and rules Christians more than does Christ. One need not even mention the coarse sins, like unchastity, murder, faithlessness, and stinginess, which are everywhere in vogue.<sup>3</sup>

1) *Die Augustiner Kongregation* (Gotha, 1879), p. vi.

2) Luther believes that reflections upon the last day can bring only comfort and happiness to Christians. It ought to be prayed for as a consummation devoutly to be wished. They sin who fear its coming. This is his advice already in *The Lectures on Romans* (ed. by Ficker) II 193. Cf. also his sermon on the subject, *WA*, VII, 487; Walch, XII, 1006. Incidentally, he never shows any tendency to set the exact date of the momentous day.

3) *WA*, X, 1, II, 95 ff. Gospel sermon for 2d. Advent.



Luther will speak the truth about conditions though he lose twenty heads for it. Among 3000 preachers one will find scarcely four good ones. But if preaching were as it should be, cloisters and bishoprics would be driven out of the land. Since, however, everything is quiet and progressing, it is a sure sign that things are all wrong.<sup>1</sup>

The trouble with the hierarchy is that they are proud, pompous, and greedy, that they collect money under false pretenses and are not merciful to the poor; that they shirk real work but waste endless hours in observing idle ceremonies. They are given to spreading evil reports and are all too ready with harsh measures for people that differ with them. They are unchaste and they confuse people's consciences with technicalities of administration and of canon law.<sup>2</sup>

Among the first are papal privileges, liberties, immunities, indulgences, exemptions; among the latter laws concerning forbidden degrees of marriage and those which make secret engagements binding. Luther more than once goes into detail with these cases. He would not carry the prohibition of marriage beyond the third degree of relationship, which is the standard set by the Old Testament.<sup>3</sup> Though Luther's views on the second question seem a bit strange at first glance, they really represent a step forward. The custom of clandestine marriages and secret engagements had been a problem for the authorities during the whole Middle Ages. The church had felt itself constrained by actual conditions to recognize illegal marriages, but Luther thought it was time to clean house. The daughter must take

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1) *WA*, VII, 810, ff: IX, 951.

2) *WA*, X, 1, I, 634.

3) *WA*, IX, 540.

the man of the parents' or guardian's choosing, even though she has engaged herself to another — or even though she already has children by the other. However, in the last case the father ought not to insist on his right. But the fourth commandment must stand supreme and the pope has no right to annul it by saying that the secret engagement is valid.<sup>1</sup>

Young people are lured into the monasteries and induced to take vows they know nothing about. Needless oaths are also required in the schools. Mendicants invade parishes and by their emotional sermons and high-powered confessional methods induce gullible women to empty their purses and go through extravagant forms of penance.<sup>2</sup> The church is filled with orders and sects and lacks the unity of spirit. If it could set a better example itself, there might be no schisms with the Greeks and Bohemians.<sup>3</sup>

In short, the devil has everything in the church — except baptism. It is high time to root up all religious establishments and cloisters. Paraphrasing Jeremiah 48:10, the preacher, in the postil of 1521, writes thus: Gott wil, man soll frisch dreyn hawen mit seynem schwert, das das blutt hernach gehe; wer das werck untrewlich thutt, der ist vormaledeyet. Szo wollen sie nur die federn gelesen haben und mit fuchsschwentzen ubirweddellt seyn. Nit also, lieber Mensch.<sup>4</sup>

### The Sermons as They Reflect the Personality of the Preacher

A most interesting phase of Luther's sermonizing

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1) *WA*, X, 1, I, 643. In 1519 in his "Sermon v. d. ehelichen Stand" (*WA*, II, 169) he was not yet quite clear on the question. But his advice at that time substantially agrees with that given here from a postil sermon of 1521.

2) *Ibid.*, pp. 642, 691, 664.

3) *WA*, VII, 515.

4) *WA*, IX, 601; X, 1, II, 29; X, 1, I, 666.

is his treatment of the Scriptures. His attitude toward them was critical in the sense that he was not hampered by the traditional interpretations of the church. Further, the Humanists had taught him to appreciate the study of sources and of languages. Thus exegesis became the "open Sesame" to all the Scriptural treasures that he dealt out to his students and to his congregation. His greatest and most original achievement in this respect was to find the close connection, as Holl puts it, between experience and exegesis (*Erleben und Auslegung*). It was this experience that taught him to see a new fifth sense in Scripture — the spiritual one — beyond the four in vogue from the earliest times. Through the spiritual sense the whole Bible became a mirror of Christ and faith. The sober literalness of the famous medieval commentator, Nicolas of Lyra, was therefore not wholly to Luther's liking in these years. That does not become so apparent in the sermons as it does in the *Lectures on Romans*, in which Lyra's interpretations are often mentioned but seldom accepted.<sup>1</sup>

On the whole, Luther's comments on the different parts of the Bible were sound and sober.<sup>2</sup> But in these early years his enthusiasm over his great discovery and a not yet vanquished allegiance to the medieval allegorical method led him here and there into amusing vagaries of textual interpretation. In fact, the allegorical method is very much in evidence in the early sermons from first to last. If the end justified the means, one might

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1) The best treatments of Luther's relation to Lyra are contained in the *PRE*, article "Lyra," in K. Holl, "Luthers Bedeutung f. d. Fortschritt d. Auslegungskunst," *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, Vol. I, and in M. Fischer's article on Lyra in the *Jahrbuch f. Protestantische Theologie*, 1899.

2) This applies especially to the quotations which Luther like the medieval preacher strewed in profusion throughout his sermon. The writer examined a representative number in the postills and found nearly ninety-five percent to be soundly applied, while a small number were used allegorically and a few arbitrarily.

praise his allegories because they nearly always serve to bring out some worthwhile idea; and one may also concede that they are original and clever. But this does not change the fact that they are medieval in tone and strained in their applications. The best one can say is that in allegorizing Luther never sought to prove but only to "water and strengthen" what had already been proved by unequivocal words of Scripture. "There can be no allegorical sense until the historical sense is exhausted." "*Mysteria streiten nicht*,"<sup>1</sup> he said, repeating an axiom that was observed in disputations already in the Middle Ages.

A few examples will serve to show what Luther's imagination stimulated by his religious experience could achieve in this respect. From the second verse of Psalm 143: "In thy sight shall no man living be justified," he gathered that we must die to sin before we can be justified.<sup>2</sup> Psalm 8:6 reads: "Thou hast put all things under his feet" — not on his head! Thus it is plain that we must despise all earthly things.<sup>3</sup> In Psalm 118, we are the stones which the builders reject. The builders are the tribulations of life which make us into corner-stones.<sup>4</sup> A very daring instance is the interpretation of Psalm 137:9, "Happy shall he be that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones," in which the stone is taken to be Christ and the little ones our evil thoughts.<sup>5</sup>

Luther believed, as many devout students of the Bible have since done, that the first chapter of Genesis contains a summary of the whole Bible. It comprehends the eternal reincarnation of the Son, the mortifi-

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1) *WA*, X, 1, I, 140; 417; IX, 511.

2) *WA*, I, 46.

3) *Ibid.*, p. 126.

4) *Ibid.*, p. 89.

5) *WA*, I, 487.

cation of the old, and the rebirth of the new, man.<sup>1</sup> "Without form and void" in the second verse signifies that we are to be wholly without merit.<sup>2</sup> Noah's intoxication shows that God is a wonderful artificer in leading us through flesh to the spirit. Yea more, Noah in his cups is a type of Christ, who was also naked and laughed at.<sup>3</sup> Whenever Cain, Ishmael, Esau, or Herod occur in the text, they are promptly set up as idols of work righteousness, as are also the Jews.<sup>4</sup> Jacob's shrewd dealing with Laban causes the preacher some trouble. Our reason, of course, will say that Jacob cheated. But Jacob acted out of faith and where faith is, the works are right. However, one shouldn't follow every work of a saint. God puts such things into the Bible to give offense to our reason, so that we drop works and follow faith.<sup>5</sup> In the story of Christ's birth, Mary stands for Christendom and by the "Tuchleyn wird vorstanden die predigt des Evangelii."<sup>6</sup> In a sermon on the Circumcision the preacher adroitly maneuvers from a defensive into an offensive position and shows that circumcision is a plain sign that no one is to be saved by outward works.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Christ by saying: "Enter ye in at the strait gate," wanted to show that we

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1) *WA*, IX, 329.

2) *Ibid.*, p. 330.

3) *Ibid.*, p. 349.

4) Luther's attitude toward the Jews is dealt with fairly and thoroughly by R. Lewin. *Luthers Stellung zu d. Juden*. (Berlin, 1911). In the early period Luther had hopes that the Jews might be converted. He inclined to blame the pope for their recalcitrant attitude and deprecated the aspersions against them in the Passion sermons. But they evidently are associated in Luther's mind with heretics and blasphemers, for their name is very glib upon his tongue, in connections where we would avoid the racial designation even if we were speaking of the Old Testament race. It ought to be added that since Jews had been banished from Wittenberg in the middle of the fifteenth century his early knowledge of them was derived from books and gossip, not from actual experience. In 1536 they were also ejected from all the domains of the Elector John Frederick of Saxony.

5) *Ibid.*, p. 560.

6) *Ibid.*, p. 534.

7) *WA*, X, 1, I, 508.



could be saved only by faith.<sup>1</sup> One of Luther's favorite topics of allegorization — as it was already with the writer of the *Heliand* back in the ninth century — was the entry of Christ into Jerusalem. Nearly every time he treated this text, which occurs twice in the lections for the Christian year, he found some new nuance of hidden meaning. Thus when Christ commands his disciples to get the donkey for the journey he does not say, "Go into Jerusalem" but "Go into the city," thereby signifying that the church is not bound to any visible organization or place. Only Christ rides into the city, not the apostles, to signify that salvation is by faith, not by works. Faith and works are also indicated, respectively, by the young ass on which Christ rode and by the old one which followed behind, and so on.<sup>2</sup>

At least once our preacher indulges in some of the arithmetical gymnastics of the medieval number sermons. The ancient Anna, the prophetess, who blessed Jesus as a child in the temple, lived seven years with her husband and was a widow for eighty-four more. These numbers evidently contain the sum of Biblical teaching, Luther thinks, if one had time and talent to inquire into them. He then takes a try at searching for the hidden treasure himself — partly to show that there is enough in the Scriptures to occupy the minds of men without dragging in Aristotle and his ilk.<sup>3</sup>

Whenever Luther finds a difficulty in the text or some apparent discrepancy between the authors of different books of the Bible, he is just as likely as not to state the fact from the pulpit.<sup>4</sup> "Here the text is corrupt;

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1) *Ibid.*, p. 330.

2) *WA*, IX, 633 ff.

3) *WA*, X, 1, I, 422.

4) Muelhaupt in his *Die Predigt Calvins* (Berlin, 1931), pp. 31, f. states that this was true of Calvin also.

about which see Erasmus," he once said.<sup>1</sup> He seeks to explain Matthew's inaccurate quotations of the Old Testament by what he calls the single and multiple sense of the text or "Synecdoche." Thus the statement: "Out of Egypt have I called my son" is to be understood in the multiple sense as applying to all the children of Israel. But since Christ belongs to Israel, the verse therefore fits for Him also. Or, to take another instance, Christ said of Jerusalem that it stoned the prophets, whereas actually only a few people of Jerusalem stoned them. Similarly, Matthew uses the multiple sense when he says that both malefactors mocked Christ on the cross, whereas actually only one of them did. However, it is not pleasant to debate about these things, says Luther, though it is necessary for the learned to do so against heretics and blasphemers. The believer will take for granted that everything is well and right in the Bible even if he can not prove it.<sup>2</sup>

Luther's education included nearly all the learning of his time. It is not surprising therefore to find that his sermons contain quotations from most of the standard authors of his day, both ecclesiastical and secular.<sup>3</sup> Augustine is quoted most often by far, and Gregory, Bernard, Jerome come next in frequency. The greatest array of secular authors occurs in the two sermons on the sixth commandment. Here besides Augustine are quoted Horace, Ovid, and the *Speculum Exemplorum*, each twice, Baptista of Mantua, Guarinus of Verona, the *Summa Angelica*, Aristotle, Ambrose, and Jerome each once. Ordinarily the Bible is quoted from five

1) *WA*, VII, 530.

2) *WA*, X, 1, I, 598 f; II, 33.

3) The excellent introduction to the "Wartburgpostille" goes into the subject of Luther's use of sources in detail. (*WA*, X, 1, II). Cf. also O. G. Schmidt, *Luthers Bekanntschaft mit d. alten Klassikern* (Leipsic, 1883).

to ten times as often as secular and ecclesiastical authors combined. What is more, many of the latter are named only to be refuted or ridiculed. Even the Master of Sentences in the earliest period is shown to have used inaccurate definitions,<sup>1</sup> though Luther usually is quick to add that they might be understood correctly.

Another question is, of course, his use of illustrative material, such as anecdotes or legends. In spite of his objection to worthless legends about Dietrich von Bern — a favorite expression with him — and about certain supposed saints,<sup>2</sup> he liked a good story as well as any medieval or modern preacher. He quoted them from the *Vitae Patrum*, to an expurgated edition of which he wrote an introduction in 1544; from Esop, of whose tales he began to form a collection later on; and from many other sources.<sup>3</sup> Allusions to history, "wie man in den Chroniken [or "Historien"] liest" are not infrequent in the sermons.<sup>4</sup>

The preacher can also supply his rich quota of illustrations from nature. Some are taken from standard collections on the order of the *Physiologus*. Thus he supposes that a snake has all its life in its head or that palmwood does not bend and may therefore symbolize the Scriptures, or that the hyena mimics the human voice in order to attract man to his doom, as Pliny says. But by far the greater number are based on his

1) *WA*, I, 84.

2) He did not altogether cleanse his earliest sermons of them. Cf. the one for St. Barbara in 1517 (or earlier?). *WA*, IV, 639.

3) He refers his readers to some of these sources at the beginning of a sermon on Simon and Jude (*WA*, IV, 666). From the *Vitae Patrum*, Luther quoted the well-known saying that, though a bird may fly over your head, you can stop him from building a nest there. Another common story, which he quotes in the postils (X, I, 315), goes back to Herodotus: All the evils of all men are heaped together on one pile for redistribution among them. Each man, however, unconsciously chooses the evil he had borne before.

4) *WA*, II, 95; IX, 426; I, 51. G. Scheil, *Die Tierwelt in Luthers Bildersprache* (Bernburg, 1897).

own observations and in the front rank among his numerous references in this category are those to a certain humble animal of the sty which furnished him with meat for comparisons as well as for the table.

Many people who are not interested in Luther's religious views would nevertheless be fascinated by the energy and imagination which he displays in presenting them in his sermons. His feeling for the need of concrete illustration, his marvelous command of language, and his religious fervor formed a combination that still makes the reading of them something of an adventure. Take his illustrations, for instance. Some of them are exaggerated, some not in good taste, but all of them vibrate with life. The gospel which reveals the disgrace of man, he says, is as intolerable to the self-righteous as the sun is to the night owl or wine to a man in a fever.<sup>1</sup> He who resists Christ's efforts in his behalf is like a round piece of wood that tries to resist the carpenter's attempt to make it eight-cornered. Once he even ventured so far as to say that work righteousness was exactly as bad as feeding children to Moloch and Baal.<sup>2</sup> Justified sinners are like bake-ovens full of fire, giving off flames of good works.<sup>3</sup> That we are at the same time sinners and righteous and must nurture both faith and its fruits is symbolized by the cherubs in the Holiest of Holies who face in opposite directions yet contemplate the same thing, the Ark of the Covenant.<sup>4</sup> Justification is the lantern searching for the coin of righteousness and sweeping the world clean in the search, not a miserable coin of works seeking for the lantern.<sup>5</sup> Our natural eye,

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1) *WA*, I, 112.

2) *WA*, X, 1, I, 335.

3) *Ibid.*, p. 131.

4) *WA*, II, 46.

5) *WA*, X, 1, I, 259.

which Christ at one time urged us to pluck out, likes to look upon a young Grethe or a young Hans rather than on an old woman or old Hans. But this is, of course, the mousetrap that catches our senses as it did Adam's. His eyes were opened to become perfectly blind.<sup>1</sup>

It is in the nature of human beings never to be satisfied with their own lot. When someone wears a fine new shoe, the outsider sees only its shapeliness, while the wearer thinks only of the pinches.<sup>2</sup> People give money to the church for many foolish reasons, as, to have their names cried out like a brand of wine from the pulpit after death. Some of the money could be used more fitly to establish places where poor priests might stick their heads into the Bible day and night to learn something about it.<sup>3</sup> The priests pasture their sheep as the butcher does his on the Saturday before Easter.<sup>4</sup> Their busy affairs with chapels and organs and what not reminds Luther of nothing more than of girls playing with dolls and boys riding hobby horses.<sup>5</sup> When fools who disregard the Word of God become enmeshed in the consequences of their vaunting deeds, then the ass's ears begin to appear through the lion's skin.<sup>6</sup>

Sometimes the comparisons are all too racy. He who offers his good works on the day of judgment only furnishes the devil with a certain article used in the lavatory.<sup>7</sup> Who blasphemes the name of God is like a priest that feeds his pig out of a chalice.<sup>8</sup> Of the

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1) *WA*, I, 270.

2) *WA*, X, 1, I, 315.

3) *WA*, VII, 256, 250.

4) *Ibid.*, p. 711.

5) *WA*, X, 1, II, 40.

6) *WA*, II, 91.

7) *WA*, I, 276.

8) *WA*, II, 88.



pope and his cohorts he once said: We must feed these "mastschweyn" for the Lord until he comes to butcher them. The pope ought to be the stable boy of the cattle of the Lord and place our feed before us.<sup>1</sup>

Luther liked to quote proverbs and later in life made his own collection of nearly five hundred of them.<sup>2</sup> They appear sparsely in his first sermons but become more numerous in the later ones, being especially so in the postils. But his own language is sententious in a high degree. He had the gift for coining effective phrases. The ecclesiastical "big-shots" are the "grosse Hannsen," human reason becomes "Frau Hulde mit der Potznase" or "Frau Isabel," the pope is an "umbram et larvam" — a shadow and a fake (mask). He often indulged in paradoxical statements, sometimes to such an extent that not only the sense became obscured<sup>3</sup> but that some of his hearers must have been offended, unless simple-minded and conventionalized people in those days were not what they are now.<sup>4</sup> But apart from the outrance of some of his coinages there are in his sermons enough "winged words" for a small anthology. A sample list, taken from the sermons in chronological order, follows. "The Word of God is terrible to the fearful, fire to the ardent, oil to the meek. Whatever is in your disposition, that it will be unto you."<sup>5</sup> "The world praises him who has done much,

1) *WA*, IX, 459.

2) Cf. E. Thiele, *Luthers Sprichwoertersammlung* (Weimar, 1900).

3) For instance in the sermons for the Conversion of Paul and for the fourth Sunday after Epiphany, 1517, *WA*, I, 126, 128.

4) Luther often made drastic statements, as: "thu keinn wergk, das du from werdest" (*WA*, VII, 811), but he usually in the same breath so modified them that his presentation of the matter is correct, though it was not exactly milk for babes. Many of his followers, however, heard only the heroic part of the statement. That becomes clear from an "Instruction" to preachers, published in 1535 by Urbanus Rhegius (trans. by C. M. Jacobs in the *Lutheran Quarterly*, 1928, pp. 354 ff.). Rhegius criticises the preachers who give offense by speaking in this wise: "Our good works are nothing at all. They are useless. Faith alone does it. If you believe, you become righteous and are saved."

5) *WA*, IV, 511.

God him who has received much."<sup>1</sup> "It is easier to make a bad man pious than a pious man better."<sup>2</sup> "God does the good through himself, the bad through the bad."<sup>3</sup> "The sum of Christian ethics is that we be mothers and sons to one another."<sup>4</sup> "The more you realize your impurity, the purer you are."<sup>5</sup> "Out of the same rose, the bee extracts honey, the spider poison."<sup>6</sup> "The living law and doctrine of Christ are not given in three languages, but in one, which even the unlearned understand."<sup>7</sup> "Adeoque vanus homo est, ut delitiae eius occidant eum."<sup>8</sup> "Things never stood better with the church than when many preachers were killed."<sup>9</sup> "Though God promises to give, he nevertheless wishes to be implored."<sup>10</sup> "Signs of God's mercy have never yet been missing in any age."<sup>11</sup> "It is a much longer and more difficult task to teach mortification of the flesh than liberty of the spirit."<sup>12</sup> "It is in the nature of men to think that they are being misled when something new is preached to them."<sup>13</sup> "The whole Scripture teaches nothing but cross and patience and the greatest part of the cross is to tolerate the weak and to be friendly with unfriendly people."<sup>14</sup> "He does not pray well who prays only for himself."<sup>15</sup> "God wants to crown the work for the person's sake, Cain the per-

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1) *WA*, I, 78.

2) *WA*, I, 136.

3) *WA*, I, 408.

4) *WA*, IV, 605.

5) *Ibid.*, p. 613.

6) *WA*, I, 512.

7) *WA*, IV, 646.

8) *WA*, IV, 702. Cf. Calvin's "ea est hominum pravitas, ut laetari nequeant quin Dei obliviscantur" (Prof. W. Rockwell, *Class Lectures*, University of Chicago, 1931).

9) *WA*, VII, 244.

10) *WA*, VII, 374.

11) *WA*, IX, 416.

12) *Ibid.*, p. 547.

13) *Ibid.*, p. 620.

14) *WA*, II, 114.

15) *WA*, VII, 483.

son for the work's sake."<sup>1</sup> "If there were a physician at the end of the world who could cure the disease of sin, all countries would be emptied, because everyone would risk his property and life to find such a doctor."<sup>2</sup>

Much more could be said about Luther's methods of making his sermons effective: his heaping of synonyms, the dramatization of his material, his polemical argument (he could argue cleverly as well as sharply),<sup>3</sup> and the like. Let it suffice to discuss briefly only one question more: In how far did he project his own personality into his preaching? The answer must be a double one. These early sermons are Luther through and through. No reader who knows anything about him would mistake them for the work of any other man. He speaks as one who has authority. When he is discussing an important or controversial question the tone of "But I say unto you" is very much in evidence. Furthermore, we know that his message was the result of his own personal experience.

Yet one may say that if the sermons proclaim his personality they do it in spite of, not because of, his efforts, for he keeps himself and his affairs in the background, much more so in these early years, it would seem, than later on, judging from the quotations given by Werdermann in his study of a group of sermons around 1530.<sup>4</sup> A good example of this is afforded by the sermon he preached on the day he left for Worms, April 2, 1521.<sup>5</sup> Surely one might expect at least a word mentioning his departure on this momentous trip.

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1) *WA*, X, 1, I, 327.

2) *WA*, X, 1, II, 42.

3) Cf. the arguments against monastic vows (*WA*, X, 1, I, 681 ff.).

4) *Wittenberger Gemeinde*, p. 276 ff.

5) *WA*, IX, 672 ff.

But if he did mention anything it is not indicated in the sermon, which deals with the results of faith in love and good works.

When he alludes to his own religious experiences he does it in such a veiled way that often only the historian, not the hearer, can gather of whom he is speaking.<sup>1</sup> Once, on August 3, 1516, he concluded a sermon with a statement of this kind, the true import of which must have been veiled from himself as well as from his hearers. We will quote it in conclusion, for in it he unwittingly voiced the prophecy of his own future life work:

“Thus are those men of God,” he said, “who are led by His spirit. After they have been taught the discipline of the outward man, they neglect it and look upon it only as a prelude. They are now ready to offer themselves for any real task the Lord may have chosen for them. And when God leads them through sufferings and humiliations they know not whither, they cling to no favorite plan of their own, but still submit all things to the Lord. Thus their work will be without a name at the beginning, because they are not leading, but being led.”<sup>2</sup>

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1) Cf. *supra*, p. 95. The allusions to his personal history in the postils are of this nature. Cf. the introduction to them by W. Koehler, *WA*, X, 1, II.

2) *WA*, 1, 73; Walch, X, 1295.

## CONCLUSION

We have followed Luther's sermonic career from its inception in 1512 to the time ten years later when he gathered up the experiences of a decade of preaching into the postils for the benefit of preachers and laymen both in his own and in following times. We have seen how in his early years, in spite of a large residuum of scholasticism, the new spirit was already manifesting itself in the criticism of ecclesiastical conditions, in the insistence on a more inward moral, and in the new emphasis in Biblical doctrine.

There followed a period—the lull before the storm, so to say — in which our preacher yielded to the gentle, self-effacing piety of mysticism, while the needs of his practically ethical nature were finding an outlet in the picturesque and popular sermons on the Decalogue. Soon afterward, everything that nature had given him and experience had taught him was fused into a unified whole by the intensity of the controversy over indulgences and the conflict with the ecclesiastical authorities. He began to proclaim from his pulpit a new way of salvation, grounded in the Scriptures, illuminated by his own insight, and adapted to the needs of the hour and the hearts of his hearers. His congregation, including now not only Wittenberg but all of Germany, came to look upon the young preacher as a prophet and leader. How seriously he in his turn cared for the needs of his invisible, far-flung congregation may be realized by consulting the long list of printed sermons on important questions in the bibliography, in which, to be sure, the power of the press, rather than of the pulpit, was manifesting itself. He wrote to them about prayer and morals and marriage; about baptism, in-



dulgences, penance; about the eucharist and the correct way of preparing for it; about excommunication, processions, and preparation for death.

The sermons he thus evolved were as different from those of the later medieval preachers as the plays of Shakespeare are different from those of his predecessors. Quite fascinating is the range of his genius, the combination in it of the simple and child-like with the heroic, of brusque and earthy straightforwardness with fine religious sensitivity, of mystical depth with ethical practicality. He had taken over from the pre-Reformation preachers a sermonic instrument that had been developed through centuries of practice. But he disdained their artifices. What need had he of scholastic distinctions, of quotations from the fathers, of mechanically accumulated and arranged encyclopedias of illustrations, or of the tricks of amplification listed in the homiletic manuals? His heart was filled to bursting with a great new idea that had remade his own life and was remaking the lives of many of his countrymen and contemporaries. The details of the art of sermonizing are all very well for ordinary men. That is why after Luther's time the solid body of homiletical wisdom, developed in part and transmitted by the pre-Reformation preachers, was appropriated and added to by those that followed after. But for a time the rules were in abeyance while the giants of the Reformation occupied the pulpits. Indeed, not the least of their achievement was the creation of new rules to supplement the old. Preaching was never the same again even when rules once more asserted their sway over the second generation. And the new era began in that historic hour in which Luther with a heavy heart accepted the duty which

Staupitz placed upon him, publicly to preach the Word of God.

The busy preacher of modern times who goes to Luther on a Saturday night to seek practical hints for his Sunday sermon, only to be disappointed, will hardly appreciate how much Protestant preaching was influenced by him. The difference between the sixteenth and the twentieth centuries is after all too great in most cases for direct appropriation. Nor can the heroic words of a man who was changing the course of history be applied without modification to a more settled even if troubled age. What then did Luther contribute to the sermon and to the generations of sermonizers after him? Perhaps four things stand out.

First, he enhanced the position of Christ within the sermon. The world is full of preachers, he said of his age, but none of them preach Christ.<sup>1</sup> The doctors depict Him as a teacher but say nothing of how He lives in our hearts by faith.<sup>2</sup> What was thus lacking Luther supplied in rich measure. No more was the preacher to preach or the hearer to believe that the work of Christ had to be supplemented by the intercessions of the Virgin, or of the saints, or by the ministrations of the divinely appointed hierarchy.

Secondly, he made the sermon Scriptural in a sense it had never been before. In Luther's opinion this was tantamount to making it Christocentric. Its content was to be based on Scripture and on Scripture only. The holy legends, the church tradition, the canon law, and the pronouncements of the pope were no longer to have a place in it. The plan at Wittenberg, as later at Geneva, was to preach on the whole Bible or at least on

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1) *WA*, IX, 671.

2) *Ibid.*, p. 631.

the chief parts of the Bible consecutively, in order to show the Christian congregation "how much more wonderful the Word of God was than the words of men."

Thirdly, he revalued and deepened the ethical teachings of his time. The focus was not to be only upon the act but also on the attitude. The idea of Christian love and duty was to be substituted for the idea of personal merit. Social service was to displace the multitude of ceremonial and contemplative works. The dignity of the monk was to make way for the dignity of the man.

His last contribution to the sermon was to enhance its position in the service and in the life of the church in general. One of his criticisms of the church of his time was that it unfortunately regarded the celebration of the mass as more important than the preaching of the Word.<sup>1</sup> From this inferior position Luther raised it to the very pinnacle of divine worship, negatively, by rejecting the idea of the quasi magic sacrifice of the mass, positively, by exalting the office of preaching. He believed that the New Testament was first and foremost a spoken, living, continuing word, and no mere writing. Christ had written nothing himself.<sup>2</sup> Thus the preacher's voice became the medium for the message of God to man. Where that was heard one could be sure of the presence of the true church. No calling was more important to him than that of the preacher.<sup>3</sup> "Even if a king could build a church of pure gold, or of emeralds and rubies only, what would all these great

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1) *WA*, II, 112. Of course, the friars had voiced similar criticisms long before Luther. Cf. *Owst, op. cit.*, pp. 93 f.

2) *WA*, X, 1, II, 34 f., 204. We know from other statements that the living voice was after all to be bound to the written word.

3) The best summing up of his ideals for preachers is contained in two sermons on John the Baptist, written in 1521 (*WA*, VII, 500 ff., 520 ff.; *Walch*, XII, 1016 ff.).

and glorious things count for, compared with one true, pious, God-fearing pastor or preacher?"<sup>1</sup> He is sure that "ein boes prediger ist schedlicher dan hundert-tausen Turcken."<sup>2</sup>

If one may correctly say that the Reformation began as the result of the inner religious experiences of a single person, one may just as correctly add that its progress was the result of the reciprocal influence between the living voice of the gospel preacher and the Christian congregation of hearers. The glory of a good thing in anyone, Luther once said, consists in this that it flows out upon others. Thus his sermons are at one and the same time subjective and objective in the best sense. He drew from the depths of his own personal religious experience, but forgot about the personal self and universalized the experience in communicating it to the Christian congregation before him. Out of this marriage of personal faith and communal sharing were born these first examples of Protestant preaching — the early sermons of Luther.

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1) *Luther's Works*, Philadelphia ed., IV, 299 ("Explanation of 82. Psalm").

2) *WA*, IX, 671. Luther says next to nothing about the necessity of a well-educated ministry in the early years. That fact was evidently taken for granted. The increasing enrollment in the "Divinity School" at Wittenberg during this time gave little cause for complaint.

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